The SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA

BY CHRISTOPHER N. JOHNSTON

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The seven churches of Asia.

THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA

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PATMOS.

Showing town, harbour, and the isthmus connecting the two ends of the island.

THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS AND A MAP

BY

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"The leaves of the Tree were for the healing of the nations"

PROPERTY OF
THE CHURCH ON THE WAY

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PREFACE

These chapters are a by-product of the War. They took the form of Sunday Evening Lectures to the congregation of St. Stephen's Church, Edinburgh, during the absence of the Minister at the Front. They were prepared as a humble War service and not with a view to publication, but they are now published at the request of some who heard them and of others who did not. They do not claim to unfold the results of any original research, but such results as recent research, and in particular that of Professor Ramsay, has yielded, have not been overlooked. Three of the cities, Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum, and also Patmos have been visited by the writer. In preparing these short studies the endeavour has been made to steer a middle course between technical discussion which is arid to

the ordinary reader, and uncritical homily which is distasteful to the alert of mind. The writer's object has been to bring specially into prominence, with such force and freshness as he has been able to make available, those features of the Seven Letters which appeal to historical imagination or quicken religious emotion.

Mr. J. Roberton Christie, K.C., has kindly revised the proof sheets.

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MAP OF SEVEN CITIES OF ASIA.
At end of volume.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

THE Letters to the Seven Churches are in the Apocalypse of St. John, though they are not altogether of it. Before dealing with any passage or text of Scripture it is well to glance for a moment at its literary and historical setting.

For several centuries before, and for a century or two after the commencement of our era the Apocalypse or ecstatic vision was the popular form of religious literature among the Jews. Prophecy had failed. There was no prophet, no open vision among the Chosen People. The voice too of the sweet singer had ceased. The psalmist had hung his harp upon the willow tree. Religious emotion and religious hope found expression in the Apocalypse,

the vision of judgment and triumph. The sorrow and suffering of the people were its inspiration. The world had fallen upon evil days. Prophecy—the glorious prophecy of the race—seemed altogether disappointed of fulfilment. The chosen people of God were scattered, oppressed, and degraded. The future was black. It was no temporary cloud in the sky as in the old days of the prophets. A dark night had settled upon the people.

Moved by these conditions the seer turns himself to the eternal problem of the reconciliation of divine righteousness with the apparent triumph of evil and the grievous sufferings of God's people. The hope of the speedy restitution of the temporal sceptre to Israel no longer suffices. That supposed promise has so often failed; political conditions are so hard and hopeless. The eye of the seer now ranges beyond the temporal horizon. He looks not for a cycle of speedy temporal deliverance, but for a divine interposition which is not to restore but to destroy and rebuild. The enemies of the Lord and of His people are to be cast down in utter and

eternal destruction. The people of God are to triumph over them not as mortal citizens of the City of David, but as immortal citizens of the City of God. Amidst all the bitterness, the turgid extravagance, and the obscure symbolism of the Apocalypse, life and immortality, so dark or so dim to the prophet of old, are now struggling into light.

The form of the Apocalypse was conditioned by the oriental character of the writers, the primitive mythological and cosmological conceptions which they inherited, and the symbolism which is a common feature of the religious writings with which they were familiar. To the modern reader this symbolism is the characteristic feature and the peculiar difficulty of apocalyptic literature. The prophets of Israel used symbols as illustrations to make matters plain to the reader. The apocalyptic writers seem to the eye of the modern mind to have used symbols to make matters dark and mysterious. Again, the length of view of the Apocalyptic seer as compared with the prophet, and his emancipation in his visions from temporal and mundane

conditions tended to make his symbolism more daring and seemingly extravagant. But there was method in his work, and there were well understood conventions, so that much that to the modern seems dark and obscure was plain and simple to the ancient reader steeped in this literature.

In every age Christian writers have naturally and wisely availed themselves of literary forms which were familiar and popular at the time. In the first age of the Church the Apocalypse was the most familiar and the most popular form of religious literature, and accordingly it is not surprising that the Apocalypse finds a place among the Christian writings. The conditions of Judaism which determined the form of this literature were in some aspects not dissimilar from the conditions of Christianity. Dominating conditions for the votaries of both faiths were a sense of oppression and persecution by an unbelieving world and the hope of ultimate deliverance through divine interposition. Many Christian Apocalypses were produced in the first three centuries of our era, differing in detail from

contemporary Jewish works, but inspired by the same ruling purpose, preserving the same form, and governed by the same conventions. Many of these have perished, but some have been preserved. None are now familiar or known even by name except to scholars, save the greatest of all, and the only one upon which the Universal Church has placed the mark of canonicity, the Apocalypse of St. John, familiarly known as the Book of Revelation.

This Book contains passages of singular power and beauty which depict the final triumph and exaltation of the Redeemer and the salvation and glory of His people. It looks forward with confidence to the victory of Christ and His people over the power of evil and the establishment of an everlasting and glorious kingdom of peace and righteousness. In this aspect the Book is in harmony with Christian aspiration and Christian teaching. But the passages in which these promises are set forth are interspersed among other passages hard to understand. The monsters, the weird names, and the precise and

elaborate numbers perplex and confuse the Christian reader. In the past men have either been content to leave these passages alone as things uncomprehended and incomprehensible, or else they have endeavoured laboriously to work out schemes of interpretation the general disagreement of which is the mark of their futility.

But in recent years new light has come. It has been made clear that the writer was not attempting to foreshadow any great scheme of human history covering the centuries, but was dealing with contemporary events and the struggle between the Roman Empire and the infant Church. This clue has made many things plain, at all events to the scholar, and has dispelled much of the mystery of the Book. The broad outlines of the vision are now intelligible, though there may still be doubt and difficulty about some of the details. This discovery does not really militate against the religious value of the Book. No doubt to some it may come with a sense of disappointment to find that relief from perplexity brings with it the loss of a

scheme of all the things that future ages shall see, to which the key though hidden was perhaps discoverable. So far as mundane history is concerned we now know that there is no such scheme in the Apocalypse. But we do not need any such scheme, for there is no reason to question the wisdom of the divine plan which keeps hidden the book of future history. The ways of God with man are the same in all ages, and though the Apocalypse may take its materials from but a few years of human history it may truly set forth the progress and the final issue of the long conflict between the powers of darkness and the armies of the living God. What the dragon, the beast, and the monsters are to the Roman Empire in certain of its aspects, these aspects of the Roman Empire are to the powers of evil which from age to age assert themselves in the world, and seek to triumph over and crush the Church of God.

The purpose of the Apocalypse is to strengthen and encourage the Church at a time of trial and difficulty. The world was very evil—so it seemed to the writer—and

for the Church there were three great sources of trial—external persecution, internal corruption, and the long delay in the expected coming of the Lord. The Book is designed to encourage the faithful in the midst of these trials by the assurance of the coming of the Lord, His final triumph over all the powers of evil and darkness, and the preparation for His people of a sure place in the City of God.

The Book of Revelation is in some aspects the most distinctively Jewish of the Books of the New Testament. The writer was a Jew; he was saturated with Jewish tradition and Jewish symbolism; he used Jewish forms of expression; and he was working after a Jewish literary pattern. Moreover, the Christian standpoint in relation to the world did not differ very much from that of the Jew, widely different as were the outlooks of the two forms of faith. The Jew, like the Christian, was at war with the world; was persecuted and afflicted. Both faiths were passing through a period of disillusionment—of disappointed hope. To both it seemed that the world was very evil and the times were waxing

late. Both longed for and both conceived that they had been promised a day of final restitution and triumph. To both it seemed that this day was past due. It is not singular then that a Christian writing cast in a Jewish mould should have a strongly Jewish flavour. There are, however, in the Book certain non-Jewish elements, passages which have no source in and elicit no response from orthodox Judaism. A Christian thread runs through the whole, and here and there upon that thread are strung clusters of bright shining jewels. One such cluster, the most notable of all, is the group of Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia.

The condition of Christianity, as has just been pointed out, had its counterpart in the condition of contemporary Judaism. But Judaism had no Church. This was a distinctively Christian conception, and accordingly in a Christian Apocalyse the Church must have due recognition. This is one purpose of the Letters. The present condition and the future hope of the Church are the theme of the Book, and the writer feels that

he must set forth at the outset what the Church is. As the late Dr. Milligan put it, he must place the Church upon the field of history. The form in which this was done was doubtless suggested by the fact that the pastoral letter had come to be recognised as the form in which Christian greetings and instruction were communicated by the Apostolic Fathers in the primitive Church. The Epistle is thus grafted on to the Apocalypse, to the genius of which it is foreign. The ordinary Apocalyptic seer did not write formal and orderly letters to certain communities; he poured forth his visions and his ecstacies to the world. But the author of Revelation feels that he must write a letter. He must bring the Christian Church into relation with the contents of his book through the use of the form of communication generally used in the Church for such a purpose.

The writer takes Seven Churches of Asia —seven the symbol of unity in diversity— and he makes this group of Churches a type of the Universal Church. But he does not describe the seven arbitrarily or fancifully so

as to bring out conveniently certain general characteristics of the Universal Church. On the contrary he treats the circumstances of each Church with wonderful historical fidelity and insight. But the general purpose is never absent from his mind. The Epistles are themselves a wonderful illustration of unity amid diversity—unity of purpose with diversity of detail.

He is still a Jew who writes. One can trace this in his mode of thought and his forms of expression. But one feels at the same time that there is here a breath of the West. The author is constrained by his training to adhere to symbolism in expression, but elaborate symbolism does not harmonise with epistolary address. There is therefore in these Epistles little darkening of counsel by symbols hard to understand. All may not be plain, but there is no worrying puzzle and there is free scope for the wings of imagination. The oppressive air of Syria does not brood over the page which seems lit rather by the sun of Greece. The words come home to the modern mind.

The writer's method and habit of thought probably required that if the Universal Church was to be represented by a group of Churches this group should number seven. The Seven Churches addressed may not have been the seven most important Churches in Asia at the time. But they were not arbitrarily selected. They all lay upon the great circular high road of the Province of Asia, and they are mentioned in the order in which a messenger landing at Ephesus would reach them. There seems therefore to be reason for holding with Professor Ramsay that each Church of the seven was a centre of correspondence by letter for a district of the Province of Asia. The infant Church, as the books of the New Testament seem to attest, maintained its organisation and its unity through correspondence by letter, which was in accordance with the custom of the time in the Graeco-Roman world. The position of the Seven Churches as the centres of seven circuits of correspondence harmonises with the literary device of epistolary address adopted by the author of the Apocalypse. Each Church repre-

sented a district of Churches, and the group of Seven Churches represented the whole visible Church throughout the Empire. This representation was not merely geographical. Each district of the seven represented a distinct type of Church, not necessarily peculiar to the special district, and each Church had special accentuated features which, though not singled out for notice in the case of other Churches of the group, were not necessarily wholly absent in the case of any of them. In this way the complete group adequately represented the whole Church—the Church for whose consolation and encouragement the book was written.

It is not known, though the language of the Book certainly suggests it, whether the Seven Churches were, prior to the date of the Apocalypse, distinctively recognised as a group of seven and known as such. However that may be, the address to them was a literary device. The Letters had no separate existence, and were never intended to be transmitted separately to each Church. Indeed were it otherwise doubtful the terms of the Letters make it clear that the contents of

each Letter were meant for all the Churches. Each contains the general call, " He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches." Accordingly the Letters are more artificial, and deviate more from the ordinary letter than do any of the other Epistles in the New Testament. The writer had a general purpose in view which ran through all the Letters and dominated their structure.

On the other hand it is clear that the writer, in framing each Letter, had the particular Church addressed clearly before his mind, and was strongly influenced by the sense of personal address. An absent father sends a letter to his children and includes a paragraph for each. The whole letter, all the news and all the counsel, is meant for all, but, consciously or unconsciously, he puts into each paragraph details peculiarly apposite or interesting to the particular child. Throughout the several paragraphs the general and the particular purpose are both present in his mind.

The Seven Letters are framed upon a

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common plan. There is a close correspondence between the structure of each.

1. Each Letter is addressed to the Angel of a Church. The belief which long obtained that this Angel was a contemporary local Head or Bishop of the Church is now generally discarded. Nor has the extreme counter theory advocated by Dr. Milligan that the Angel and the Church are identical, and that the Angel is just the Church conceived as active—in other words that the Angel is to the Church very much as a ball rolling is to the same ball stationary—obtained general acceptance. The middle position which rejects both these theories is well defined in its negative aspect, but positive explanations are difficult and obscure. The Angel, it is said, is the heavenly counterpart of the Church which it represents. This is in accordance with religious conceptions current at the time, though difficult to the practical modern mind. But if the Angel be a heavenly denizen why is it addressed as if it shared the sin and infirmity of the Church ? Has the symbolism broken down, or may angels affected by guilt

inhabit the heavenly regions? These are hard questions and are beyond the scope of this work. Perhaps with our present light the matter cannot be more adequately expressed than in the words of Professor Moulton (approved by Professor Ramsay), who describes angels as being "spiritual counterparts of human individuals or communities dwelling in Heaven but subject to changes depending on the good or evil behaviour of their complementary beings on earth." [1]

2. In each Letter the mention of the Angel as the person to whom the Letter is addressed is followed by a description of the sender of the Letter. The attributes ascribed to Him in the several Letters are nearly all taken from the description of the glorified Son of Man in chapter i. of the Book. It has been suggested that the description in chapter i. is subsequent in composition to the Letters, and has been built up out of the descriptions in them. That may be so. But on the other hand there are phrases and allusions in the Letters, the meaning of which is brought out

[1] *Journal of Theological Studies*, vol. iii. p. 514.

by other passages of the Book, and in such cases the Letters do not appear to have priority in date of composition.

3. The description of the sender of the Letter is followed by a statement of his knowledge of the particular Church and a characterisation of its conduct and condition. Next come words of praise or blame, warning or encouragement, according to the condition and the deserts of the Church. The Letter concludes with a solemn call to all to listen to the message of the Spirit to the Churches and the promise of some glorious blessing to him that overcomes.

There are certain differences in structure between the Letters. In the first Letter and the last four, after the description of the sender of the message, the words occur, "I know Thy works." These words do not occur in the second and third Letter according to the earliest and best authenticated manuscripts. Again in the first three Letters the appeal, "He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches," comes before the final promise. In the last four it comes

at the end of the Letter. The reasons for these variations are not clear, but the details of the Letters are so carefully studied that probably there was some reason in each case.

It has been suggested that the Letters divide themselves into two groups, the first three and the last four. There is (as just pointed out) an obvious though unexplained difference between the two supposed groups in the position assigned in the Letter to the general call to listen to the voice of the Spirit. Further, the first three, which are supposed to form one group, were the Churches of cities much more important than any of the remaining four. So much is clear, but the matter becomes difficult when recognition of this grouping is said to be found in the general tenor of the Letters. It has been represented by expositors of great weight that there is a difference of tone—a difference in the way in which the Church is regarded—that in the first three Letters the Church is represented as powerful and on the whole prosperous, whilst in the last four it is represented as weak and struggling and overborne by the world.

Whether this be so is largely a matter of impression. It is not borne clearly home to the present writer.

The canonicity and the authority of the Book of Revelation were questioned in very ancient times. The question again came to the front at the Reformation, and it has been raised in more recent times. But the consciousness of the Christian world has always responded to the seven times repeated call to listen to the voice of the Spirit speaking to the Church, and the place of the Apocalypse among the Holy Books of our religion is assured for all time. There may be dark passages in the Book of which the meaning is difficult and the profit seems doubtful, but there are many shining pages. The message to the Church of God which is embodied in the Seven Letters is one of these, and the light of research tends more and more to illuminate its details. In these Letters there is some reflection of the contents of almost every Book that goes to make up the great message of the New Testament. There is a sum of Christian doctrine and teaching. The

Trinity is there in the recognition of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; the Incarnation in the Son of Man; the Atonement in the white robes; the Resurrection in Him who was dead and is alive; the Ascension in Him who hath the seven stars in his right hand. Faith and works are there, each in its place; love and service; judgment for sin; and for the faithful eternal life. All are there.

EPHESUS.

The view is from a tier of the theatre. The stage is covered by a tourists' temporary shelter. The ruined dressing-rooms are beyond. The long street ran seawards.

CHAPTER II

THE EPISTLE TO EPHESUS

Rev. ii. 1-7

Revised Version

To the Angel of the Church in Ephesus write ;

These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, he that walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks : I know thy works, and thy toil and patience, and that thou canst not bear evil men, and didst try them which call themselves apostles, and they are not, and didst find them false ; and thou hast patience and didst bear for my name's sake, and hast not grown weary. But I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works ; or else I come to thee, and will move thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the works of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. To him that overcometh, to him will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.

Authorised Version

1 Unto the Angel of the Church of Ephesus write ; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his

right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;

2 I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:

3 And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.

4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

5 Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

6 But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate.

7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

The first Epistle of the series is appropriately addressed to Ephesus as being not only the chief city of the group but also, as is believed, the city from which John had been exiled to Patmos. According to constant ancient tradition John resided in his later years at Ephesus. In the days of persecution—probably that under the Emperor Domitian—he was banished to Patmos, but later when the storm was past he was allowed to return to Ephesus.

Ephesus was one of the great cities of

antiquity. Situated upon one of the main highways between the East and West it was an important emporium of commerce and one of the chief centres of Greek civilisation. Here, as in modern Constantinople, the East met the West, and each accommodated itself to the other and took some of its colour. Long before the advent of the Greeks, Ephesus had been a seat of sensual and mystic worship. This worship the Greeks easily adopted and adapted according to their wont. They gave a name from Greek mythology to the chief divinity, but the cult remained oriental. It was eastern devotion or superstition that drew worshippers in throngs to Ephesus, and enriched the artificers and merchants of the city with orders for votive offerings to be presented at the shrine of the Goddess, where was guarded the mysterious image said to have dropped down from the Heavens. The name might be that of Diana, the virgin huntress, but the real object of devotion was the fruitful Mother, and the worship centred in the mysteries of the elemental and reproductive forces of Nature.

Like other Eastern towns which have a large mixed population and are centres of religious worship, Ephesus was restless and excitable. The past had seen many and rapid political and social changes, and in the present, as appears from the narrative in Acts, the populace was easily stirred into enthusiasm or excitement. Now the converts make a holocaust of their profane books, now the mob rage like men possessed in the theatre without knowing themselves what it is all about.

The ruins of Ephesus are one of the most interesting spots in the world. About most other holy places there is an element of uncertainty. Of Capernaum even the site is unknown. At Jerusalem the Temple has disappeared and the scene of Calvary is in dispute. At Bethlehem the place of the Nativity is a mere guess. At Athens it is disputed whether " Mars Hill " really was a hill or was the Forum in the centre of the city. At Rome the scenes of the trial and the execution of St. Paul are unknown, and it is in dispute whether St. Peter ever was in Rome. There is an element of dissatis-

EPHESUS—THE LONG STREET.

This street ran from the theatre towards the sea. The gulf is now away in the distance to the right of and beyond the bold hill.

faction as regards all these cities in their modern aspect, in relation to sacred story. But at Ephesus one deals with a certainty. The theatre there, still in wonderful preservation, is the one building in the world of which it can with certainty be affirmed, "What is related in Scripture took place here." The auditorium, as in all ancient theatres, is open to the heavens, and one sees still the rows of marble seats towering one above another round a semicircular hollow in the hill side. This theatre is said to have provided accommodation for thirty thousand spectators. Other buildings near the theatre have been disclosed by recent excavations, bright and fresh after long ages of burial, so that in the clear midday sunlight one's eyes are dazzled by the white glory of the marble. Standing among the seats of the theatre one sees a long straight paved street running down to where the harbour used to be, clear, broad, and distinct as is Princes Street, Edinburgh, seen from the Calton Hill. One can imagine the shop of Demetrius at one of the corners and picture the crowd surging up the street towards the theatre.

The mention of the harbour reminds one that one of the most remarkable features in the history of Ephesus was its chase after the sea. Originally the town was on the coast at the mouth of a river. Here the Temple of the Goddess was built, and here, as is shown by recent excavations, it always remained—new buildings being from time to time erected on the old site so that there are the ruins of several Temples, but always on the same spot, for sacred sites are the hardest things in the world to change. The river silted up, the sea receded, and the town was obliged to move down to maintain its character as a seaport. But the Temple remained on the old site, though deserted by the town. At the time of St. Paul the centre of the town near the theatre was two miles from the Temple which now lay quite outside the city gates, and the sea was still receding. Now the sea is far away from the ruins, and if Ephesus were a city of the living it would not be a seaport. One is still shown quays and places for fastening boats which were high and dry long before the sojourn of the Apostles at Ephesus.

The Epistle from Patmos is not, as already indicated, the first passage in the Christian history of Ephesus. The city fills an important place in the story of St. Paul; and his name as well as those of Timothy, Aquilla, and Priscilla, Apollos, and Tychicus, were associated with Ephesus long before the writer of Revelation settled in that city. Here St. Paul lived and taught for upwards of two years, and the account of his sojourn terminates with one of the most dramatic narratives in history—the story of the riot promoted by Demetrius and the silversmiths of Ephesus. Nor did the Christian history of Ephesus end with St. John. Ephesus continued to be a Christian centre for many years, and one learns something of it in the following century from the writings of the Fathers. There is one feature in the Christian history of Ephesus which touches the imagination. Ephesus was associated with many martyrs, for it was the highway by which martyrs from the provinces of the East were brought on their journey to Rome and the Coliseum. In a letter of Ignatius, written perhaps twenty

years later than the probable date of the Apocalypse, he says, "Ye are a highway of them that are on their way to die with God." In later days, when the Church had attained to power, a general Council of the Church was held at Ephesus (431), and this appears to have been the last noteworthy event in its history.

Unto the Angel of the Church of Ephesus write: [1]

Each of the seven Epistles begins with a command by the Lord to John to write the Epistle. Each Epistle is addressed to the Angel of a Church. It used to be supposed that the Angel was the Bishop or local head of the particular Church, but, as explained in the introductory chapter, this idea has now been generally abandoned. It is at least doubtful whether at this date each Church had an episcopal head, and Angel or Messenger would not be an appropriate de-

[1] The Authorised Version is quoted in these head-notes as being the more familiar and generally the happier, though of course not so meticulously accurate as the Revised. Clear mistakes are noticed in foot-notes.

scription of such an office-bearer. The Angel, as is now generally understood, meant the heavenly counterpart of the earthly Church, the ideal or spiritual power embodied in the visible Church and manifested through its agency.

These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.

In this Epistle the description of the sender of the message seems to have no special reference to the circumstances of the particular Church. As the Church at Ephesus was the representative Church, so the Lord is here described in his relation to all the Churches in his universal character as their King and Head. In accordance with the general plan of these Epistles the description of the sender of the message follows the imagery of Revelation i. In the last verse of that chapter it is stated :

> " The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches : and the seven candlesticks are the seven churches."

This leads back to the majestic description of the Lord in an earlier passage :

> " I saw seven golden candlesticks ; and in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow ; and his eyes were as a flame of fire ; and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace ; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars : and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword : and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead."

By the walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks is indicated the presence of the Lord with the Churches. He is not far from any one of them. He comes down into the midst of them and moves among them. He is familiar with their service, their trials, and their failures. He needs not to

say, "I have heard of thy works"; he says, "I know thy works." The stars are the heavenly counterparts of the earthly candles. These the Lord holds in his right hand, a cluster of precious jewels glittering before him. One recalls the words of Malachi (iii. 17): "They shall be mine, saith the Lord, in that day when I make up my jewels."

Of the lamps and the stars Lightfoot wrote:

> "The contrast between the Heavenly and the earthly fires—the star shining by its own inherent light and the lamp flickering and uncertain, requiring to be fed with fuel and tended with care, cannot be devoid of meaning. The star is the supersensual counterpart, the heavenly representative, the lamp the earthly realisation, the outward embodiment."

I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: and hast borne, and hast patience,

and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

Works, labour, patience, hatred of evil, steadfastness in the faith, unwearying perseverance, and all for no selfish end but "for my name's sake!" Surely this is a noble testimony, surely this is praise such as few earthly Churches can deserve by the voice of the great searcher of the thoughts and intents of the heart. But—Is there then a "but"? Can there be any qualification of such glowing praise? Yes. There is one note of reproof. "Thou hast left thy first love." Left thy first love! Is that all? Surely that is not a very serious charge to set against such well-tried labour and fidelity? One cannot always be at fever heat. Surely constancy may replace enthusiasm. Surely the fires of the lover may without reproach mellow into the quiet devotion of the spouse. But no. The Master does not so regard the matter. In His eye the waning of the warm glow of love to Him is not a natural process or even a slight declension. It is a serious

falling away, it calls for repentance, it renders necessary words of stern warning.

But the warning must not blind us to the virtues of the Church. The Church in Ephesus had approved itself a zealous and steadfast Church, a faithful and believing Church in an unbelieving world. Among its virtues this, as we gather, was the outstanding one, that it was loyal to the faith. It had to contend not only with the unbelieving world without, but with false teachers within. Such was the character of those who say they are apostles and are not. Who these persons were, and what was the nature of the false doctrine which they preached, can be matter only of conjecture. The original idea of the Apostolate appears from the narrative in Acts to have been that it must consist of twelve persons corresponding to the twelve originally chosen. When and in how far this idea was departed from is not known; it appears that on the one hand the number was enlarged, while on the other hand the expression did not become merely ambulatory or one of mere courtesy, but that there were

certain definite marks of the Apostolate. During the latter part of the first century the Church seems to have been troubled by persons who claimed the Apostolic character and asserted authority for their teaching in virtue of this claim. Some of them doubtless had troubled the Church in Ephesus. It is significant that Ignatius, writing some twenty years later than the Apocalypse, specially singles out loyalty to the faith as the distinguishing virtue of the Church in Ephesus.

The Church is praised for its doctrinal purity and its steadfastness in the faith, and it does not detract from the importance of such fidelity that those who maintain it in the face of assault are themselves exposed to special danger. One danger which is always present is lest controversy should absorb all the enthusiasm of the nature, and thereby blunt the edge of devotion. Bishop Burnet points out how he found this to be the case in the Continental Churches of the Reformation in the seventeenth century. But the failing is not peculiar to any Churches or to any age. There is indeed a threefold danger in con-

troversy: (1) that small points may be confused with great principles; (2) that zeal may quench charity; and (3) that the struggle after doctrinal fidelity may absorb all the religious energies of the nature.

Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

Solemn and stern words, solemn and stern as addressed by the Master to a Church distinguished for its labours, its fidelity, and its perseverance. But they are words of truth, words instinct with divine spiritual insight. Faith, works, perseverance to the end, these profit not when love has faded, for love is the vital force in religion. The outward body of religion may long survive the decay of love. Religious moderatism clothed in orderly conventions may seem to flourish for a season. But when love fails there is dry rot at the core.

> It is the little rift within the lute,
> That by and by will make the music mute,
> And, ever widening, slowly silence all.

There have been divisions and separations in the Church in the past, ostensibly based upon various grounds, some of which seem now inadequate. But whatever may have been put forward at the time as the ground of grievance it will generally be found that behind the movement there lay, upon the part of those who separated, the suggestion, just or unjust, that the branch of the Church which they quitted had lost her first love; that the old Church had become the cold Church. Whatever may have been the truth of these reproaches the particular controversies belong to the past. The question of to-day for every Church is—How stands it now with this Church? Is she full of love for her Master, or has that love departed from her? Without that love all her organisations, all her agencies and energies, all her zeal, will profit nothing. Woe to the church to which her Master can say, "I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and thy righteousness, and thine orthodoxy; I know thine organisation and thy committees; I know thy territorial plan and thy supplement

scheme ; I know thy Bible Classes and Sunday Schools, and Guilds, and thy Church Magazine ; I know all these things and much more than these to thy credit, nevertheless I have somewhat against thee because thou hast left thy first love ! "

Far away be any suggestion that the Churches are more deserving of such a rebuke now than in past days. Missionary zeal is, as has been pointed out, the thermometer of the Church's love for her Master. So has it been in all ages. Whenever that love has glowed warm the desire to carry abroad the gospel and proclaim its message to the nations who walk in darkness, has inflamed the souls of the followers of Jesus. Unworthy as the efforts in this direction of the Churches of the Reformation still are, even their feeble endeavours put to shame the apathy of their own past, and justify the conviction that there is growth in their midst of that devotion to the Master which is the mainspring of all missionary effort and of all true religion.

But the rebuke addressed to the Church

at Ephesus contains a warning not merely for the Church, but also for the individual. One is not called upon to look into the souls of other men. One has no right—a layman at all events—to question others in regard to the thoughts of their hearts, their spiritual experiences or deficiencies. But every man can look into his own heart; and there is a question there for each one. How stands it with oneself? Did one ever experience the glow of that first love, and if so, has one lost it? Must one say in the sad words of the poet:

> Where is the blessedness I knew
> When first I saw the Lord?
> Where is the soul-refreshing view
> Of Jesus and His word?
>
> What peaceful hours I once enjoyed!
> How sweet their memory still!
> But they have left an aching void
> The world can never fill.

One's experience is for oneself. One's individual judgment should be limited to one's own case. But the warning is for all. Religion can never satisfy the soul or satisfy the Master whilst He can say to his follower, "I know thy works and thy labour and thy

patience and thy orthodoxy; I know thy regular attendance at ordinances, thy liberal subscriptions, thy zeal for all good works, thy careful training of thine own family; I know all these things; nevertheless I have somewhat against thee because thou hast left thy first love."

"Faith, hope, and love," said the Apostle, "but the greatest of these is love." He might have added many another virtue to the list, but the conclusion would still have been the same—the greatest of these is love. "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven her, for she loved much," said the Master of the weeping woman at His feet; and His beloved disciple has recorded for our instruction, "God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in him."

'Tis love! 'tis love! Thou diedst for me!
I hear Thy whisper in my heart;
The morning breaks, the shadows flee;
Pure universal Love Thou art;
To me, to all, Thy mercies move;
Thy nature and Thy name is Love.

The Church is called upon to "remember," to "repent," and to "do." In this, as has

been well said, there is an appeal to the head, the heart, and the hand. The last appeal to "do the first works" is characteristic of the tone of the Letters. They do not suffer the reader to forget that faith without works is dead. The revival of the first love must be evidenced by a renewal of the first works.

But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate.

After the words of warning and rebuke the message pauses and reverts for a moment to the note of praise, as though to console the spirit bruised by the hard rebuke. Of the Nicolaitanes nothing certain is known. It is perhaps reasonable to identify them, as is generally done, with the false teachers already mentioned who say they are Apostles and are not. It is supposed that the Nicolaitanes were one of those sects which have arisen from time to time throughout the whole course of the Church's history, sensual mystics who make Christian liberty a cloak for licentiousness. In its grosser forms this teaching is known as antinomianism, in its more subtle

manifestations it has at times deeply tainted clerical life in the Church of Rome.

Finally, after the call to the whole Church to listen to the voice of the Spirit speaking to the Seven Churches, there comes the special promise to Ephesus :

To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, that is in (the midst of) [1] *the Paradise of God.*

The promise is to him that overcometh—not to him whom fortune favours, to him who has a smooth path, to him who steps softly and amiably through life—No. The promise is to him who has not shunned the stony way, who has triumphed over danger and difficulty, who has striven and has overcome after conflict long and sore. And a wonderful promise it is! "I will give to eat of the tree of life that is in the Paradise of God."

One may note in passing that, familiar as seems the word, "Paradise" occurs only three times in the Bible. In the supreme hour of His agony the dying Saviour tells the

[1] These words are not in the original.

penitent thief, "To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." In 2 Corinthians xii. 4, St. Paul describes how in a vision he was "caught up into Paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." Finally, there is the third occasion of the use of the word in the text before us. Paradise is a Persian word, and appears to mean a park or garden, hence the garden of God.

In all ages and among all nations the heart of man has craved for life—larger, richer, fuller, longer life. The quest for life sends man to religion to find the living God, the source and fountain of life. The search is associated with what lies deepest in the sacred recesses of the soul, and is nearest to the divine in man's nature—

> The wish that of the living whole
> No life may fail beyond the grave.
> Derives it not from what we have
> The likest God within the Soul?

From the remotest ages the craving for life has been associated with living images, and one of the oldest of these, reaching far

back into the dim misty origin of self-conscious thought, is the image of the tree of life, the tree bearing fruit, the partaking of which is the earnest and the pledge of immortality. One finds this image at the beginning of the Bible. One reads in the second chapter of Genesis: "Out of the ground made the Lord to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden." One finds the same image in the last chapter of the Bible, "And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations."

But it is not merely to the ancient mind or to the eastern mind that this image appeals. It has caught the imagination even of the modern scientific mind. The first step which marked the great reaction that set in against the materialism that seemed dominant in the

scientific world some forty years ago, was the publication of *The Unseen Universe* by two of the most eminent scientists of the time, Balfour Stewart of Manchester and Guthrie Tait of Edinburgh. Upon the title-page of that work stand in the original Greek the words: "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life."

It has been pointed out that the promises in these Epistles are appropriate to the circumstances of the particular Churches. As the virtue of Ephesus was her steadfast refusal to partake of the forbidden fruits of idolatry and lasciviousness, so the promise to those in Ephesus who overcome is to partake of the divine fruit which alone can satisfy the soul.

In its general application the figure of the tree of life suggests the partaking by the human soul of the divine nature. In its more special Christian application it suggests feeding upon the Bread of God which came down from Heaven. But after all one does not want theological explanations of such a figure. It is the Tree of Life, the Tree by the Waters

in the Garden of God, that fills the imagination and satisfies the Soul of Man.

Ephesus is a waste, a heap of ruins, a city of the dead. Her candlestick has indeed been removed out of its place. Gazing upon her crumbling walls one looks into a tomb. But the promise to the faithful in Ephesus remains true to-day. And if one raises one's eyes from this valley of death and fixes them, as did the Seer of Patmos, upon the clear Heavens beyond, one discerns dimly at first, but surely, a land of life and hope, and in that land there is a pleasant garden where beside the crystal waters stands a tree whose boughs have flourished fresh for all the ages past, and will blossom for all the ages yet to come—the Tree of Life which is in the Paradise of God.

CHAPTER III

THE EPISTLE TO SMYRNA

Rev. ii. 8-11

Revised Version

And to the Angel of the Church in Smyrna write ;

These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and lived again : I know thy tribulation, and thy poverty (but thou art rich), and the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and they are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Fear not the things which thou art about to suffer : behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried ; and ye shall have tribulation ten days. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

Authorised Version

8 And unto the Angel of the Church in Smyrna write ; These things saith the First and the Last, which was dead, and is alive ;

9 I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty (but thou art rich), and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.

10 Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer :

SMYRNA.

View from a house-top near the sea. The hill is Pagos, or the "Crown." It looks steeper from a distance.

behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days; be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

11 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

Smyrna has appropriately the second place among the Churches to which Epistles were addressed. Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum were the three chief cities of the Province of Asia, and in importance there was little to choose between them, indeed each contended with the others a claim to be regarded as the chief city of Asia—"First of Asia" as it was expressed.

Smyrna is a very different place from Ephesus in the present day. Ephesus is desolate, ruinous, and forsaken of the sea. Smyrna is a populous and flourishing seaport. Like Ephesus, Smyrna was an important semi-Greek and semi-oriental city of antiquity, and it was one of the great centres of eastern commerce. But, though a busy seaport and a centre of industry, Smyrna was not vulgarised. It was more Hellenic in spirit than Ephesus, and its citizens were noted not only

for their public spirit but also for their distinction in literature and art.

At a comparatively early date Smyrna formed an alliance with Rome; and when Asia became a Roman province Smyrna was a very favoured city. Even in these days it had a large Jewish population, and this has continued to be one of its features down to the present time. There are few cities in the world in which there are so many Jews.

Smyrna is not mentioned in connection with the journeys or the Epistles of St. Paul, which is curious, as it was but forty or fifty miles from Ephesus, where Paul laboured for upwards of two years. There can be no doubt, however, that Smyrna must have fallen under Paul's influence, and that a Church must have been founded there when "all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks." The history of the Church in Smyrna has been continuous down to the present day, but it has not been very eventful. Originally the Bishop of Smyrna was under Ephesus, but subsequently Smyrna became itself a metro-

politan see. Apart from the message in the Epistle now under consideration, the most interesting circumstance in connection with the Church at Smyrna was the long bishopric there of Polycarp, who connects the last of the Apostolic band with the Fathers who stand in the light of secular history. A word later, however, in regard to Polycarp.

Smyrna is a beautiful city situated on a fine bay in a fertile and pleasant country. The charm of the place is no mere modern fancy. The city was celebrated in classic times for the beauty of its situation and surroundings. By the water-side there was always the bustle of commerce on the quays, but on the slopes above there was a city of temples, palaces, and flowers. A special feature is the Acropolis or Citadel Hill, which of old was crowned with a circle of towers. This was known as " The Crown of Smyrna," and the city was often and in different ways associated with the idea and figure of a crown. This circumstance is of special interest in view of the imagery of the Epistle. Although it belongs to the Turkish Empire, Smyrna is

not a predominatingly Mohammedan town. There is, as has been mentioned, a large Jewish population, but the majority of the inhabitants are said to be Christians, and for this reason Smyrna is known among the Turks as " the Infidel City."

At Ephesus interest centres in the ruins. At Smyrna nobody thinks of ruins. As the city has continued to flourish and has been constantly renewed there are few ruins of interest, and the life of to-day is so full and abundant that the visitor is not in the mood for ruins. The centre of life and interest is the Bazaars, where all the merchandise of the East is spread at the visitor's feet, and he is urged to purchase by representatives of almost every nation under heaven. Whether the purchaser enjoys the bargaining or not, the Smyrna merchant certainly does so. There is to him no satisfaction in a sale unless he has a long haggle over it, unless he begins by asking a pound and ends by getting five shillings for something that is really worth half-a-crown. Solomon wrote : " It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer, but when he is

gone he boasteth himself." But the purchaser who boasts of the good bargain he has made against the Smyrna merchant probably speaks without knowledge.

The merchants of Smyrna, as has been mentioned, are of divers races. This is characteristic of the town generally. There is perhaps no place in the world where one sees types of so many nationalities as in the Bazaars and on the quay at Smyrna, unless it be on the Galata Bridge at Constantinople. There is a small but appreciable European population, and there are excellent missionary schools under European management.

One cannot think of Smyrna without recalling that Smyrna has been virtually closed to Europe by the Great War, and has itself been a centre of warlike operations. Smyrna was one of the last of the cities of Asia Minor to fall under the dominion of the Turk, but for several centuries this fair city and province have been under his corrupt and incapable government. The city has not suffered so much as have some other places, where the non-Mussulman population was not so able

to take care of itself, and where there was less of the daylight of European observation than at Smyrna. But at best it was a backward and sorry government, and it was a calamity for any population to be subject to it. Fortunately that government seems near its end, and there is a dawning hope that Asia no less than Europe will be delivered from it, and that the people of the near East, who in the matter of government have for centuries walked in darkness, will see a great light. The night is far spent, the day is at hand.

Unto the Angel of the Church in Smyrna write; These things saith the First and the Last, which was dead, and is alive.

In Rev. i. 17-18 it is written: "And he laid his right hand upon me, saying; Fear not, I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore; and have the keys of hell and of death." Again in verse 8 of the same chapter, similar words are used of God the Father: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the

ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty." The use of similar language of the Father and of the Son is one of the many indications of the recognition by the writer of Revelation of the Godhead of the Saviour.

The words, Alpha and Omega—the names of the first and the last letter of the Greek alphabet—illustrate the spell of that language. Alpha and Omega sounds dignified and appropriate even to this solemn theme. But how would "A and Z" sound?

In the words, "was dead and is alive," Professor Ramsay recognises a reference to the local history of Smyrna. It appears that a very similar phrase was current in regard to the city of Smyrna itself, owing to its having flourished in early times as a Greek city, been destroyed as such by the Lydians, and, after a long interval, been refounded and revived in greater strength than before. But in any view the reference here is appropriate otherwise. Smyrna was a suffering Church which needed strength and consolation, and it was fitting that the Master should be

associated in the message to Smyrna with the two great central facts which are the foundation of faith and hope in Him—His death and His resurrection, His redeeming love, and His triumph over the grave.

I know thy (works and) [1] *tribulation.*

Smyrna was a persecuted Church, and this Epistle is couched in language of tender pity and commendation. There is no note of reproof. Of the story of the persecution of the Church at Smyrna nothing is known saving one outstanding incident, the martyrdom of Polycarp. This Father occupies a peculiar position in Church history. The history of the early Church is divided into two parts, the Apostolic age, in regard to which information is derived from Scripture, and the Church of the Fathers of the second century, information in regard to which is derived mainly from the writings of some of the Fathers themselves. In regard to both these periods there is a good deal of authentic in-

[1] Not in the original.

formation, but the bridge between them so far as discernible is a very narrow one. Polycarp is one of the planks of that bridge. He did not belong to the Apostolic group. He is not mentioned in the New Testament. But in his early days, as is recorded and believed, he met the Apostle John and other Christians who had seen the Lord in the flesh. For a very long time Polycarp was Bishop or Head of the Church at Smyrna, and he was probably already associated with that Church when the Apocalypse was written. He suffered martyrdom at Smyrna in A.D. 155 On the day of his death the appetite of the multitude for blood had been whetted by the death of thirteen Christians in the arena. The Jews, though they had abstained from the sports, the day being the Sabbath, took advantage of the popular feeling to stir up a demand for the life of Polycarp, the noted leader of the Christians. He was found, and was dragged before the Roman Governor. who offered to release him if he would abjure his Master, but the aged Bishop made the memorable reply: "Eighty and six years

have I served Him, and he hath done me no wrong. How, then, can I speak evil of my King who saved me." This reply infuriated the mob the more. They called for a lion to devour Polycarp, but the sports were over for the day and could not be renewed; so faggots were collected, and Polycarp perished at the stake.

There are very few modern martyrs in the strict sense of that word. No doubt men and women have been put to death in recent times for their faith—Bishop Hannington, for example, and many missionaries and converts in China. But few if any of these had the chance of saving themselves by recantation. This latter, if not the only true martyrdom, is the highest type of martyrdom. And this is what the early Christians were called upon to face, and did face with marvellous constancy. All ages and both sexes shared the suffering and the glory. These things are so far away now that one can hardly realise what they mean. The faith of the people who had known the Apostles, and other companions of the Lord, and who stood, as

it were, in sight of Calvary, is a wonderful testimony to the truth of our holy religion. The Master for whom these martyrs died was no ideal creation of legend and literature, but a man of real flesh and blood, for had not the martyrs clasped hands that had touched the hands that were nailed to the Cross? Had they not first learned of Jesus from lips which testified, "Last of all He was seen of me"? Had they not been strengthened and confirmed in the faith by that beloved disciple to whom the dying Lord commended his mother in that charge which has captured all the ages, "Behold thy Mother"? Dare one reject the faith for which these men dared to die?

And thy poverty (*but thou art rich*).

The Church of Smyrna was in poverty. This does not mean that it was wholly composed of persons originally poor. The spoiling of goods was a common incident in these early persecutions, and doubtless many a once well-to-do citizen had been reduced to poverty owing to his allegiance to Christ. This

poverty would be the more bitter, that it was a poverty in the midst of abundance, for Smyrna was a very wealthy city. Doubtless many of the former friends and associates of the impoverished Christians were rolling in wealth. "But thou art rich." Yes, rich in faith, rich in grace, and rich in hope.

It has sometimes been represented that the Book of Revelation is antagonistic to Pauline Christianity, that there is a gulf of prejudice between Paul and John, even that Paul is pointed at by John as one who says he is an Apostle and is not. The letter to Smyrna seems an answer to such suggestions. Both in substance and in imagery it is intensely Pauline. Paul is an Apostle of suffering and persecution. Other Apostles may have been as sorely tried, but we are not brought into such intimate relations with their sufferings. The Church of Smyrna was a persecuted and suffering Church. Whether it be that this common bond of suffering encouraged the same train of thought in the Epistle to Smyrna as in the Epistles of St. Paul, or whether the writer of Revelations was familiar with and

influenced by the Pauline Epistles, we cannot tell, but the parallel is close.

I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.

The expression, "say they are Jews and are not," has puzzled many. The Jews were proud and exclusive, but no Gentile desired to be deemed a Jew. Who then can they be who "say they are Jews, and are not"? The explanation now favoured is that the word Jews is not here used as signifying descendants of Abraham after the flesh, but as meaning the people of God. In the eyes of the writer the Christians were the true Jews, the people of God. Hebrews who rejected Jesus and persecuted his followers were not the people of God—not Jews, but false pretenders, the Synagogue of Satan.

Although it was the Roman rulers, who, as the people in power, carried out most of the persecutions of the Christians, the early persecutions at all events were all instigated by the Jews. The death of the Lord Himself

is the first instance. The Stephen persecution was purely Jewish at a time when apparently Roman rule was relaxed. It was to please the Jews that Herod put James to death. It was the Jews who everywhere sought to stir up persecution against Paul, and who eventually delivered him to the Romans with insistent prayers for his blood. There is no reason to believe that this hostility terminated with the narrative in Acts. All the evidence, and in particular the Book of Revelation, confirms the view that the Jews continued to pursue the Christians with rancorous hatred.

To understand this hatred and the persistent energy with which from generation to generation it was pursued, one must have regard to the position of the Jews. They were in their own estimation a peculiar people, chosen of God, hedged off from other people, custodians of a pure monotheistic faith. All other religions were puerile, idolatrous, and profane. The Jew despised these faiths and their votaries, and desired to keep himself separate from them. But the Jew had now no home, no fatherland, from which he could

exclude the idolatrous unbeliever, or wherein he could make him a hewer of wood and a drawer of water. Everywhere the Jew was surrounded by unbelievers, and by unbelievers he was governed. How then could he keep himself separate? What was there to mark him off? The ceremonial law. That was the hedge around him, his race, and his religion. Within that hedge the unbeliever had no desire to come. So long as the Jew remained within it, he and his religion were safe. But if he broke its bounds, if he passed out of its shelter, then the flood-gates of idolatry and corruption were opened. Yet, lo! here were the Christians, most of them Jews by birth, and all professing to worship Jehovah the God of the Jews, and in the eyes of the Gentiles not distinguishable from Jews, and yet they were disregarding the ceremonial law, companying with unclean idolaters, and working folly and confusion in Israel. However keen one's sympathy with the Christian and one's antipathy to the persecutor, one must admit that from the Jew's point of view there was some reason behind his malice.

Another reason why the Jews were so bitter against the Christians was that the preaching of Christ seemed to them a reflection upon the leaders of their own race. The Chief Priests had rejected Jesus and put Him to a shameful death. Nineteen centuries have passed since then, and perhaps the world of the present day does not fully appreciate the change of aspect which the passing of time has wrought even to the Jew. He is now generally so indifferent and so tolerant that one does not realise that in the days of the Apostles he regarded the Christian with religious antipathy far deeper than that with which an Orangeman regards a Jesuit, or a Jesuit an Orangeman. The Pope does not now possess temporal power, or even such authority as the Chief Priests possessed at Jerusalem. But if the Pope had the power and were instrumental in putting a man to death as a blasphemous malefactor, one can quite understand that it would be intolerable to Roman Catholics that a person put to death by the revered Head of their own Church should be worshipped as the Son of

God by persons who having been members of the Roman Church now proclaimed that they were the only true Catholics, and incited other members of the Church of Rome to join them.

Such considerations as these, though they do not exonerate the Jews, teach moderation and tolerance of judgment. Such tolerance, alas, is rare and difficult as regards contemporary controversy. One could hardly look for it in an exile in Patmos. Very few people are able to appreciate the other man's point of view. In current controversy nine men out of ten, if satisfied that the other man is wrong, cannot appreciate that there may be something to be said for that man from his point of view. Fifty years hence it may be a matter of sober historical discussion how far the German Emperor was personally responsible for the outbreak of the Great War, or how far he may have been simply the minister of the will of his people, slowly and reluctantly drawn into an issue which he did not court. But only a rash person would venture to raise that question now, and it

would not be discussed with calmness and good temper.

The very next words in the Epistle after the reference to the Jews—"Synagogue of Satan"—suggest another illustration of the same truth. There were two sides to the Disruption controversy in Scotland, two points of view. Everybody realises that now. But the fiery controversialist of those days could not realise that. He could not appreciate the other man's point of view. His opponents were not merely mistaken, but desperately wicked, and so the Church from which they had departed was denounced even by devout and heroic men as the "Synagogue of Satan."

Little elucidation of this latter phrase is necessary. As the unbelieving Jews were not Christians, their community could not be likened to a Church, hence it is spoken of as a Synagogue. As in John's view they were followers of evil, they were not a Synagogue of Jehovah, but a Synagogue or community devoted to and the servants of the evil one.

Fear none of those things which thou shalt

suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days.

The Church at Smyrna had suffered sore trials. It seemed to stand in need of words of comfort and hope—a promise of better days to come. But this is far from being the promise which it gets. Trial and suffering are still before it. This is sometimes God's way of dealing with his afflicted people. He does not promise relief from pain and sorrow; He promises grace to bear them. One is again reminded of St. Paul. What was the message of encouragement he got in setting out upon his life's work? "I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." And when in later years he prayed thrice that the thorn in the flesh might be removed from him, did he get any promise of healing? No. The answer came: "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Nowhere in modern literature has this thought found nobler expression than in the lines of the blind Pastor:

O Cross that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from Thee:
I lay in dust life's glory dead,
And from the ground there blossoms red
Life that shall endless be.

By "casting into prison" is not to be understood imprisonment as a form of punishment. That was hardly known in these times. Imprisonment was detention in bonds preliminary to trial and punishment—the stake, the arena, the cross, or if fortune favoured, banishment to some penal settlement. By "tried" is probably meant tempted or put to the test, for the trial of the Christian generally took the form of testing him whether he would recant. The "ten days" are not ten literal days, or ten years, or ten of anything. The language is symbolical. It means a limited but appreciable space of time.

Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

Here, again, one is reminded of St. Paul. "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of

righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me at that day." Smyrna was known to the Romans as the "faithful" city. The word "faithful" is here used in the exhortation to the Church in Smyrna. If this incident stood alone it would justly be regarded as merely a coincidence. But the subtle weaving of local incident into these Letters is so constant that it is difficult indeed to regard a detail like this as a mere coincidence. There is literary art and historical allusion in every line of these Letters.

The crown referred to in the phrase, the "crown of life," is generally understood to mean not a royal diadem, but a victor's wreath. The comparison of the Christian who overcomes to the victor who wins the wreath in the athletic contest is familiar to the student of St. Paul. "All run, but one receiveth the prize," and again, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Whilst, however, the phrase "Crown of righteousness" is found in St. Paul, and "Crown of glory" in St. Peter, this very phrase, "Crown

of life," occurs elsewhere only where one would last have looked for it, in the unimaginative Epistle of St. James: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." As has already been indicated, there is local allusion in the word *crown*, which was historically associated with Smyrna.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

After the call to the Churches to listen to the voice of the Spirit which occurs in each Epistle, there come the final words of promise. The "second death" is judgment, the death of the soul. Few now hold by the literal interpretation firmly believed in by our forefathers, of passages which suggest endless physical torment as the punishment for sin. But there is perhaps danger in these days of going to an opposite extreme, and ceasing to believe in the urgency of the call to repentance,

in judgment for sin, that the soul that sinneth it shall die. It may be well sometimes to be reminded:

'Tis not the whole of life to live,
Nor all of death to die.

There is a death whose pang
Outlasts the fleeting breath;
Oh what eternal horrors hang
Around the second death!

The church officer was showing a party over the Abbey Church of Dunfermline. Somebody suggested that there was here a magnificent opportunity for a great restoration. "When I said that to Mr. X.," observed the church officer, naming a well-known and munificent native of the town, "he replied, 'I cannot help in that matter so long as hell is preached from the pulpit.'" Crude notions of hell are not likely to be preached from the pulpit of Dunfermline Abbey Church, but if Mr. X. meant to suggest that judgment for sin and the wrath of God against iniquity should not be preached from that pulpit, then he was asking something that could not be conceded by any Church faithful to the Master who taught, "Whosoever shall deny me

before men, him will I deny before my Father which is in Heaven." "What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul."

The late Principal Tulloch's volume of Croall Lectures upon Sin is a striking work upon the subject, by a liberal churchman. He points out with wealth of luminous exposition how deep realisation of sin marks off the religion of the Bible, Jewish and Christian, from other religions. This is characteristic, and it is also fundamental in our faith. No judgment, no deliverance; no condemnation, no salvation; no sin, no Saviour.

In conclusion, however, one prefers to turn away from the penalty to be avoided to behold the prize to be won. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." One is not likely to be so sorely tried as were the faithful in Smyrna. One may not be called upon to die or even to suffer grievous things for the Master's sake. But if there is no call to suffering, there is a great call to service.

Jesus, Master, wilt Thou use
One who owes thee more than all?
As Thou wilt! I would not choose;
Only let me hear Thy call.

Unworthy to wear the martyr's crown, let us look at the pierced hand; let us ask life, and He will give it us, even length of days for ever and ever.

CHAPTER IV

THE EPISTLE TO PERGAMUM

Rev. ii. 12-17

Revised Version

And to the Angel of the Church in Pergamum write:

These things saith he that hath the sharp two-edged sword: I know where thou dwellest, even where Satan's throne is: and thou holdest fast my name, and didst not deny my faith, even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwelleth. But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there some that hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also some that hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans in like manner. Repent therefore; or else I come to thee quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of my mouth. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. To him that overcometh, to him will I give of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written, which no one knoweth but he that receiveth it.

Authorised Version

12 And to the Angel of the Church in Pergamum [1] write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges;

[1] Pergamos in the Authorised Version is a blunder.

PERGAMUM.

Showing theatre on brow of hill.

13 I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.

14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

15 So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate.

16 Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

17 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

Pergamum is situated about fifteen miles from the sea coast, a little to the north of Smyrna. A steep massive hill rises from the plain to a height of about a thousand feet. Upon this hill stood the ancient city overlooking a broad valley, and the Aegean Sea beyond. It was a royal city, and as Professor Ramsay has pointed out, it was a royal site. The modern city lies on the plain below the hill upon the banks of a small river.

Pergamum was the capital of one of the temporary kingdoms which flourished between the downfall of the Persian power and the

advent of the Romans. When the Romans obtained the dominion they retained Pergamum as the capital or seat of government. That was probably still its position at the date of the Apocalypse, although it had been outstripped in commercial importance by Ephesus, and probably also by Smyrna. Ephesus and Smyrna were seaports. Pergamum was inland, and was not situated on a great trade route, and therefore it was not in a position to compete on equal terms with Ephesus and Smyrna after the Romans had given peace to the East.

Modern Pergamum is very oriental. When the visitor arrives there, he realises that he is really in the East far more so than at Smyrna or Constantinople. There is no railway, and Pergamum is reached by road from the small seaport of Dikili, fifteen miles away. One says " by road," but that is rather flattering to Turkish transport. What is called a road would be rough as the bed of a stream. The journey is generally made in country carts without springs, and the experience is like sitting on the roof of a house during an earth-

quake! But the country, the houses, and the peasants by the way are all very interesting to a western; they are so entirely eastern.

Pergamum is still a considerable town, and looks about the size of Stirling. But the Acropolis or Citadel Hill upon which the ancient city stood, is much more extensive than is the Castle Rock of either Stirling or Edinburgh, and more resembles Arthur's Seat. It lies outside the modern town, and one requires to be careful and not to stray too far alone in wandering about the hill. It is not quite a safe place to be alone in the gloaming. The hill is covered with ruins of fortifications, public buildings, temples, and altars. These the Germans have been excavating and exploring for thirty years. Some magnificent fragments have been removed and set up in Berlin Museum, of which they are among the chief ornaments.

Pergamum is not mentioned in the New Testament except in connection with the letter to the Church in the Apocalypse. Not very much is known of its history after this, either as a Christian centre or as a Roman

town. It appears to have been supplanted by Ephesus, and to have gradually sunk into obscurity. The researches of the German antiquarians have, however, revived its fame, and they show it to have been at its zenith a truly magnificent city with perhaps the finest buildings in Asia.

The public life of Pergamum, as of most ancient cities, was closely associated with religious observances. It was a city of temples and altars. No fewer than four Pagan divinities were associated with the city—Jupiter, Minerva, Dionysus (Bacchus), and Asklepios — and there were temples to all four, all of them of great magnificence.

A century before the date of the Apocalypse a new form of worship was introduced at Pergamum to which special attention is directed in the Epistle, the worship of the Roman emperor. The first temple of this form of worship which was set up in Asia was the Temple of Augustus, near the summit of the Hill of Pergamum, the ruins of which can still be traced. Two other temples to later emperors, Trajan and Severus, were subse-

quently erected, but at the date of Revelation the only temple of the kind was that of Augustus. It is not difficult to understand how, when this form of worship came to be established, the Romans found it to be a matter of state policy to encourage and support it. In worshipping the emperor the votary paid homage to the majesty of Rome. It is more difficult to understand how such an absurd travesty of worship ever came to be adopted as a new thing among civilised peoples. It began, however, during the reign of Augustus, and the extraordinary personal veneration in which he was held throughout the Roman world suggested and encouraged its establishment. It is hardly conceivable that this kind of worship could have been initiated during the reign of some of his successors. But having been started and being encouraged by authority, it became fashionable, it was cultivated as a form of flattery, and divine honours were paid to men whose morals were those of the brutes — monsters of lust and cruelty. Pergamum was a noted seat of this form of worship. It was as

already stated, the first city of Asia in which a temple was erected to the emperor. When such a temple was erected and consecrated with consent from Rome as a provincial temple, the city was made Temple Warden, and the title was one of which the city favoured was proud. Pergamum was not only the first city in Asia to become Temple Warden to a temple of the emperor, but it was also the first to become Warden of two Imperial Temples, and then finally of three—Augustus, Trajan, and Severus.

And to the Angel of the Church in Pergamum write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges.

In the description of the Son of Man in chapter i., these words occur, "Out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword." Two-edged, because that was the Roman sword with which the warrior could thrust as well as cut, whereas with a curved, one-edged, oriental sword he could only slice. These words are obviously used in the introduction to this letter because Pergamum was the

PERGAMUM.

Altar on hill-top.

seat of Roman government, the city in which the power of the sword was exercised.

I know (thy works, and [1]*) where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is.*

These words used to puzzle interpreters, and many explanations were given, but the true key has now been found. Satan's seat was at Pergamum because Pergamum was the headquarters of the worship of the Roman emperor. The chief temple of that worship in the Province of Asia was at Pergamum. Emperor worship was peculiarly obnoxious to the early Christians, even among false religions, because it was essentially profane and anti-spiritual. Nobody could have any belief in it as religion, and indeed it was a mockery of religion, although some might value it as an instrument of state policy. The common people of the East retained some sort of faith in the old deities. The educated classes, though they had no faith in pagan

[1] These words are not in the original. They occur in all the Epistles except this and the Smyrna Epistle. The distinctive feature in Smyrna was its tribulation, and in Pergamum its difficult situation—"where thou dwellest."

mythology, might still regard the old divinities as symbolising the divine power. But the worship of the emperor was different. Nobody could believe that the emperor, whether present or past, was a God, and as an object of worship he symbolised nothing save the mundane power of the Roman Empire. This was not religion, but a caricature of religion.

There was, however, a special and peculiar reason why the early Church looked with abhorrence upon emperor worship. This worship was the source of their suffering, the test by which they were tried. The Romans were easy and tolerant in religious matters. The worship of a new God, Jesus, would not have disturbed them, or even have excited very lively curiosity. The Jewish virulence against Jesus was incomprehensible to Gallio and Festus. Why should the Jews excite themselves because Paul affirmed Jesus to be alive? But on the other hand, whilst the worship of a new divinity might be a harmless eccentricity, refusal to pay divine homage to the emperor was an offence against the state, an insult to the majesty of Rome. The Jews

and other enemies of the early Christians took advantage of this idea to stir up Roman hostility to the Christians, and to enlist the support of Roman rulers who were anxious to stand well with their Imperial masters, and to approve their zeal by vindicating the sacred majesty of the emperor. "If thou let this man go thou art not Caesar's friend," was not spoken once only in the Church's history. Accordingly, emperor worship was the test applied everywhere throughout the Empire in the persecutions of the Christians. Would the accused Christian, or would he not, sprinkle a handful of incense at the shrine of the emperor? If he would not, then death at the stake or in the arena.

It has often been deemed prudent by religious persecutors to represent that their victims were proceeded against, not for their religious convictions, but for disloyalty, for rebellion against lawful authority. For example, the resistance of the Scottish Covenanters to the enforcement of forms of Church government to which they objected, necessarily involved them in resistance to the

sovereign authority which sought to impose these forms upon them. Accordingly they were represented as persons whom it behoved to punish not for their religion, but for their disloyalty. In England Roman Catholics and Protestants alike have at different times suffered under similar misrepresentation.

So was it in some of the far more terrible persecutions of the early Christians. The pretext for their punishment was their rebellion against the authority of Rome in refusing to comply with the imperial orders which directed that divine honours should be paid to the emperors. It is not wonderful, then, that the Christians looked with abhorrence upon emperor worship. Pergamum, as the headquarters of that worship in Asia, was the place where Satan had his seat. The power of evil had its habitation at the temple of the emperor upon the Hill of Pergamum.

And thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.

The Church at Pergamum was a tried and persecuted Church, and upon the whole it had been faithful. Persecution had not achieved apostacy. Of Antipas, the martyr, we know nothing. There must have been something to mark him out specially among the many who suffered at Pergamum, but what it was we cannot tell.

But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

The Church at Pergamum was not perfect. It was tolerant of evils among its own membership. There is a certain obscurity in the reference to Balak and Balaam. There are similar references in Numbers xxxi. 16, and in Jude 11. A story of immorality and idolatry follows the story of Balaam in Numbers xxiv. and xxv., but the two stories are not connected in the narrative at that place.

But although the story of Balaam is obscure,

the offences here pointed at are plain. Immorality cloaked under the robe of liberty was one of the pitfalls of the early Church. Men were prone to interpret liberty from the curse of sin as implying liberty to commit sin. The eating of meat offered to idols was a thorny subject in the infant Church. Offering it to an idol did not spoil the meat, and there seemed no good reason why it should not thereafter be eaten simply as meat. But if significance were attached to the fact that it had already been offered to an idol, then the eating of it became idolatrous. Nay, as St. Paul points out, even though one might not oneself attach significance to the offering, it was mischievous to eat it in the presence of those who did so. It is generally wrong to do something indifferent in itself in the presence of those who deem the action sinful. Such conduct may weaken the moral sense and corrupt the nature of a brother. "I do not myself see any harm in this" is a very incomplete argument, though many seem to deem it complete when the conclusion coincides with their own inclination.

So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate. Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

As already pointed out, nothing is known about the Nicolaitanes beyond what is here stated. Most commentators take it that they are the same class as those complained of in the preceding verse. But this is not clear. The rebuke of the Church at Pergamum for having evil livers and evil thinkers in its midst plainly implied that undue toleration had been shown to these offenders. There were like offenders in Ephesus, but the Church in Ephesus is not blamed for this, but is praised for the way it has set its face against them. But in Pergamum undue tolerance had bred laxity of thought and conduct. This is made clear by the words of warning. "Repent, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth." This plainly implies that the evil is within the Church, and not outside. The Church is called upon to repent lest the Master should come and fight against certain

offenders, which shows that the offenders are harboured within the Church itself.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches. To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

Some of the manna was laid up by Aaron in the ark, and there was a tradition among the Jews that before the captivity the prophet Jeremiah hid the ark in a cave in Sinai. The ark, it was believed, would be discovered, and the hidden manna disclosed when Messiah appeared. In this passage there is allusion to that legend. The manna is the bread which came down from heaven, and to him that abstains from sinful and idolatrous food the Master promises this heavenly nourishment. It is hidden because the world cannot discern it, but Messiah will disclose it to His faithful servants.

The reference to the white stone is more mysterious. Many explanations of it have

been given, more or less probable, but there is no certainty, and no general agreement. Two points, however, may be noticed. The name is not written upon parchment or anything perishable. The substance, the stone, is enduring. Again, white is a significant colour in this Book. It is the fortunate colour, the colour of victory, the colour of Heaven. "His head and his hair were white like wool"; robes "washed and made white"; "white raiment"; a "white horse"; a "white cloud"; and finally "a great white throne."

The "new name" has caused as much speculation and diversity of interpretation as the white stone. This is not the only reference to a secret name in the Apocalypse. In chapter xix. there is a description of a horseman who seems to typify the Son of Man. "His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written that no man knew but he himself."

The ideas underlying the new name are subtle and complex. There is probably some

association of idea with the new name given to Christians in baptism. But the new name was also a divine name—a name of God. There was probably, too, allusion to the new name given by the Roman Senate to the Emperor Octavius who thus acquired the name of Augustus. That was a name open and known to the whole world. The name promised by the Master to him that overcometh was secret, peculiar, and precious—a new name that no man knoweth but him that receiveth it.

But however obscure may be the allusions the promise is full of comfort and encouragement. There is a sense of intimate fellowship in the assurance. The Master is to place himself in close and sympathetic relations with His servant. There is to be a secret between these two alone, unknown to any other man, a heavenly confidence, something upon which no other eye shall rest. The promise implies personal sympathy and friendship. But the words are of value in another way, and that by reason of their very obscurity. Mystery is an important element in religion. Some natures may not need it, may have no sense

for mystery, may prefer to see as they think everything clear and plain. But to many men and women mystery is a compelling religious power. The people who framed our Confessions and Catechisms seem to have had little sense of mystery. They know everything, understand everything, and can express everything. All is plain — even the deep things of God—a logical consistent plan which the human intellect can understand from beginning to end. Important and valuable, however, as are Confessions and Catechisms, they cannot fill the whole religious life or satisfy the spiritual cravings of every heart. No doubt there may be some who are fully satisfied with clear, clean-cut schemes, *e.g.* justification, adoption, and sanctification, each logically defined as a step in the process of salvation. But there are others who cannot be so satisfied, whose souls hunger for something not just so plain, something more intimate and mysterious—a white stone, and in the stone a new name written which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

This idea of a divine mystery suggests the

Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. We reject the crude Romish idea of a physical transformation of the elements into the body that hung upon the Cross. But may there not be something inadequate in the opposite extreme which regards the elements of Communion as mere corporeal symbols of a spiritual process, and refuses to recognise any mystery in the Sacrament? The idea of a mere symbol may satisfy some, and others may be content with the idea merely of commemoration, or of obedience, but none of these ideas seems adequate to account for the comfort and spiritual nourishment which Communion brings to some souls. This supreme satisfaction is present only where there is a sense of mystery. It is not corporeal bread and wine used as a mere symbol that brings to the soul the sense of intimate communion. No, it is consecrated and mystic bread and wine that carry the worshipper into the secret presence and fellowship of One who will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it. Whenever the vision is present there

must be a sense of mystery, and where there is no mystery the vision fails, as it failed in England and Scotland two centuries ago, as it fails in Germany to-day.

The glory is departed from Pergamum. Her palaces and terraces and theatres are waste and desolate; her stately temples are quarries for the curious; her altars are cast down. She has shared the fate of the mighty Empire of which she was a proud provincial capital, whose sovereigns seated upon her hill-top proclaimed their godhead and claimed the worship of the world. The crumbling walls of Pergamum bear witness to the fulfilment of the word:

> Rome shall perish, write that word
> In the blood that she has spilt.

Jesus of Nazareth was born in the reign of Caesar Augustus—the one a lowly peasant of a despised race in an obscure province, the other the emperor of the Romans, the most powerful monarch the world had known. A hundred years had passed since then, when the Book of Revelation was written. Had the balance been redressed? Jesus, the

Galilean peasant, was now worshipped as God by scattered religious communities. But in this matter Augustus was not behindhand. The dead emperor was publicly worshipped as god throughout the Empire, his temples crowned the hill-tops, from the Euphrates to the Atlantic his worship was established and was maintained by all the force and power of the Empire; whilst the worshippers of the despised Jesus had trials of mockings and scourgings, of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword, being destitute, afflicted, and tormented.

Eighteen hundred years have passed since the Book of Revelation was written. Is the balance redressed now? Where is now the worship of the divine Augustus? His temples are ruined, his altars overthrown, no worshipper is found anywhere on the earth. Were such a worshipper to return to this sphere he would find no shrine upon which to sprinkle his incense, and from his lips would be wrung the despairing confession:

Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean.

For the peasant of Galilee is now worshipped in every clime, and sits enthroned for ever as the King and Head of our race.

As o'er each continent and island
The dawn leads on another day,
The voice of prayer is never silent,
Nor dies the strain of praise away.

The sun, that bids us rest, is waking
Our brethren 'neath the western sky,
And hour by hour fresh lips are making
Thy wondrous doings heard on high.

So be it, Lord; Thy throne shall never,
Like earth's proud empires, pass away;
Thy kingdom stands and grows for ever,
Till all Thy creatures own Thy sway.

But though Jesus has conquered and is conquering, He is still the same as in the days of His flesh. When the scarred hand was laid upon the disciple's head, and the familiar voice assured him, "Fear not," the exile of Patmos recognised that the majestic figure before him was still the Master he had loved in Galilee.

And so to-day, as eighteen hundred years ago, Jesus lays His hand upon each one of His followers, aye upon each one separately and individually, speaking as to a friend and

saying, " To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."

THYATIRA.

CHAPTER V

THE EPISTLE TO THYATIRA

Rev. ii. 18-29

REVISED VERSION

AND to the Angel of the Church in Thyatira write;

These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like a flame of fire, and his feet are like unto burnished brass: I know thy works, and thy love and faith and ministry and patience, and that thy last works are more than the first. But I have this against thee, that thou sufferest the woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess; and she teacheth and seduceth my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time that she should repent; and she willeth not to repent of her fornication. Behold, I do cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of her works. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto each one of you according to your works. But to you I say, to the rest that are in Thyatira, as many as have not this teaching, which know not the deep things of Satan as they say; I cast upon you none other burden. Howbeit that which ye have, hold fast till I come. And he that overcometh, and he that keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give authority over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the

vessels of the potter are broken to shivers; as I also have received of my Father: and I will give him the morning star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.

AUTHORISED VERSION

18 And unto the Angel of the Church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass;

19 I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first.

20 Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.

21 And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.

22 Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.

23 And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.

24 But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden.

25 But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.

26 And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations:

27 And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father.

28 And I will give him the morning star.

29 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

When in the course of his second great missionary journey, St. Paul arrived at Philippi in Macedonia, he found what was rare in any place of importance in the East, a city without a Jewish synagogue. There was, however, a quiet spot by the river where the Jews and the Gentile proselytes were in use to resort on the Sabbath for prayer. Thither St. Paul betook himself, and there, among his listeners, was a lady of some importance, a well-to-do merchant settled at Philippi—Lydia, a seller of purple of the city of Thyatira. Of this lady we read that her heart was opened, she listened to the teaching of Paul, and she showed hospitality to him and his companions. This is all we hear of Thyatira in the Scriptures apart from the Epistle under consideration. The incident is interesting, but it tells us little about Thyatira, and there is not much to be gathered anywhere about the social and religious life of that town. Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum were all cities of the first importance, centres of Greek culture and Roman dominion; Thyatira was a manufacturing provincial town. If Ephesus,

Smyrna, and Pergamum were the Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Aberdeen of the Province of Asia, Thyatira was a Hawick or a Dunfermline.

Thyatira lies much farther inland than Pergamum, in a broad valley some forty or fifty miles from Smyrna. Unlike the other cities it is a city of the plain. At one time it was a frontier town between two of the Asia Minor kingdoms, and as such it was a military station of some importance, although, owing to the flatness of the country, it was of no great natural strength. Afterwards, when times of peace came, it was a manufacturing town. As explained in the introductory chapter, the reason why it was one of the seven representative cities was that it was a central station on the great highway of the province from which letters were sent out to the cities of a circuit round it. It was an age of correspondence by letters. Probably more letters were written at that time than at any other period, except the present day. Post roads and post centres were therefore of great importance.

The busy industrial nature of the life of

Thyatira is shown by the inscriptions and records which have come down naming the different kinds of guilds of craftsmen in that city. In ancient as in modern times, cloth goods were probably the leading industry, but there were also dyers and workers in metal and in leather and other articles.

Lydia was a seller of purple. The name of a colour like this was used in a loose sense, and it has been shown that what is here called purple was really turkey red. The red dye was obtained from the root of the madder plant, which grows plentifully in the district, and accordingly the same industry now familiar in the Vale of Leven flourished in Thyatira nearly 2000 years ago. There were the like facilities—a seaport within a moderate distance, and plenty of good water.

Like all ancient cities Thyatira had its own special tutelary deity, and as was usual at that time, particularly in the East, he was a composite character, combining Greek with Oriental ideas, and he had many names.

The modern name of Thyatira is Ak Hissar. Many as are the changes which it must have

seen, it remains much as it was in the Apostolic time, an industrious manufacturing town. The population is about 20,000, of whom two-thirds are Mussulmans. It is connected with Smyrna by railway. The principal industries are cloth, particularly cotton, which grows in the neighbourhood, and carpets. What was in ancient times the principal Christian church is now, and has been for a good many centuries, a mosque. This may prove to be one of the difficulties incident to the fall of Turkish power. The eastern Christians, particularly the Slavs, look forward to restoring the Cross to the great buildings, particularly the Mosque of St. Sophia at Constantinople, which were once Christian churches. But it would be awkward for Britain as an Indian power to be a party to depriving the Mussulmans of any of those buildings which they have possessed for centuries, and which they regard as holy places of their religion.

These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass.

In the description of the Son of Man in chapter i. these words occur. "His eyes were as a flame of fire; and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace." The significance of these allusions in relation to Thyatira is not altogether clear. The dominating note of this Epistle, as of the Second Psalm which it follows in some of its expressions, is that of strength and triumph. This idea may be associated with the feet of burnished brass. In these religious visions the ideas of strength and weakness were sometimes associated with the feet—witness the feet in Daniel's vision, part of iron and part of clay. The eyes like unto a flame of fire suggest piercing insight into iniquity. Two special points may be noticed. In all the other Epistles, except the last, the corresponding passage runs, "These things saith he." Here, however, it is "These things saith the Son of God." In this there is a parallelism with the Second Psalm. "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee." In connection with this phrase too, it may be recalled that the charge against Jesus was that he called Himself

the "Son of God." Again, and this is a curious point, the feet are like fine brass. Now, through the discovery after all these centuries of a chance inscription, it appears that brass work was an industry of Thyatira, and that there was there a guild of brass or bronze workers.

I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience (and thy works);[1] *and the last to be more than the first.*

The second "and thy works" comes in awkwardly in the Authorised Version. The proper reading is, "And thy last works to be more than thy first." This passage is one of warm and affectionate commendation. "The last more than the first" signifies growth in zeal and fervour by contrast with churches where there was decline.

Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.

[1] Not in the original.

This is a difficult passage. Two questions suggest themselves. The first is—Was there any such person as Jezebel at Thyatira, or is the language figurative? Upon this question scholars have differed, but the now prevailing opinion, which one accepts with some reluctance, is in favour of the view that a particular woman is here pointed at. Support for that view is derived from the words, "which calleth herself a prophetess." This seems to correspond with the phrase, "which say they are Apostles and are not," in the Epistle to Ephesus, and nobody doubts but that these latter were real and not figurative persons.

Another difficulty in the passage is the meaning to be attached to "Thou sufferest." How could the Church deserve the warm praise accorded to it if it permitted or acquiesced in such wickedness as is here pointed at? The probable explanation is that the letter is addressed to the Church as a whole, and that as the evils pointed out were making some headway in the Church, the Church was said to suffer them. Thus one might praise the Church of England and yet affirm that it

suffered a great deal of sacerdotalism, or one might praise the Church of Scotland and yet affirm that it suffered a great deal of selfish congregationalism. This explanation seems confirmed when the Epistle subsequently reverts to the note of praise of all in the Church who do not hold these evil doctrines.

One has difficulty, however, in holding with Professor Ramsay that Jezebel is meant to share in the words of praise at the beginning of the Epistle. By a process of whitewashing, which, as it humbly appears, rests on very slender grounds, he seeks to show that this lady has been misjudged, and that she had many estimable qualities, and he even likens her to Lydia. Whatever be the truth of the matter, the writer of Revelation did not so think concerning this Jezebel, and we know nothing about her except what we learn from him.

The historical Jezebel was the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians, who, according to secular history, was the murderer of his brother and was a priest of Astarte. His daughter, Jezebel, married Ahab, king of

Israel, and her name is associated with the introduction of Baal worship among the people, the extermination of the prophets of Jehovah, and the murder of Naboth: and Jehu denounces her for whoredoms and witchcraft. Curiously the character and conduct of Jezebel were recently the subject of serious discussion in the Scottish Law Courts. Some rash person had described a lady as "a modern Jezebel," and the aggrieved lady sought damages for slander. It was answered on the part of the offender that no slander was involved, that Jezebel was a queen about whose public conduct there might be differences of opinion, but against whose private life nothing more serious could be urged than that she painted her face, which is no crime. This argument did not prevail, and it was held that the reputation of Jezebel was such that the words, "a modern Jezebel," might reasonably be construed as conveying a serious imputation.

It is not, however, safe to assume that the Jezebel of Thyatira was merely a wanton and abandoned person. The *prophet* was a distinct

order in the Church, and it is stated that she called herself a prophetess and that she taught. It is probable, therefore, that she professed to reconcile her evil practices with a presentation of Christianity which she set forth.

Christian history affords several examples of women who have stirred the religious emotions of the multitude. The most recent and perhaps the most striking instance is that of the lady who died a year or two ago in America, and who had probably more followers throughout the world than had any religious teacher of past times during his or her own lifetime. Beneath all that appears unreal and extravagant in that woman's teaching, lay the oft forgotten truth that mind not matter is the dominant power in the universe. A hundred years ago Joanna Southcote had a great following in England, and it was only a few years ago that her cult died out. This woman proclaimed herself the woman of the 12th chapter of Revelation, she promised to bring forth Shiloh, and she undertook the sealing of 144,000 persons at so much a head. Pity and patriotism shed a warm glow round

the name of Joan of Arc, but she appears to have been under the influence of emotional religious excitement, and it was superstitious enthusiasm rather than manly patriotism that inspired her followers. A Scottish female enthusiast of the seventeenth century was the lady who wrote "Lady Culross's Dream." Crowds were drawn to hear her ecstatic prayers, which were poured forth for hours.

The sins pointed at in the passage and associated with the teaching of Jezebel, are the same which prevailed in the other cities—idolatry and immorality. The words, "this doctrine," which occur in the next sentence, are significant, and bear out what has already been indicated. It was not mere vulgar immorality and purely heathen idolatry that were in question. It was some subtle form of these offences which was ostensibly justified by Jezebel and her followers on grounds of reason and Christian expediency. It is just, too, to remember that in the mouth of a Hebrew writer, condemnation for idolatry and immorality was to a certain extent a conventional form of rebuke of wickedness.

The conduct of these early Christians must not be judged too harshly notwithstanding the severity of the rebukes which they have incurred. They had been brought up in heathen surroundings, and the society to which they belonged was still dominated by heathen customs and traditions. They aimed at compromise, reconciliation of Christian faith with participation in the civic and social life of the town. But the Apostles, Paul and John, were right. It was only by stern discipline and renunciation that the Christian Church was able to triumph over the corruption of the ancient world, to restore spiritual worship, and to revive the sanctity of family life.

And I gave her space to repent of her fornication ; and she repented not.

This shows that the evil was of some standing, and that there had been warnings to Thyatira, such as Paul sent to Corinth. But these warnings had been disregarded by the party of Jezebel, and now punishment was at hand.

Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death.

For "with death," another reading is "with pestilence." If "with death" be adhered to, the words simply make the statement more emphatic. These rebukes and warnings are solemn and terrible. Luther did not care for the Book of Revelation because he found in it so little of the gentleness of Jesus. The late Dr. Boyd of St. Andrews, better known as A. K. H. B., once preached to his people from the text, "They shall sing the song of Moses," *i.e.* the song of triumph over the enemies of God. He said that he did not love the text, and he would not preach from it to any congregation but his own. But he feared lest he should fail to place the whole truth, and the truth in all its important aspects, before his own people. There are two aspects of Our Lord's character, and appreciation of his loving-kindness ought not to blind men to his fierce hatred of iniquity. Let men by all means dwell upon the grace

and the love and the pity of the Saviour, but let not them deem that they have the whole message of the Gospel before them if they suffer themselves altogether to forget "the wrath of the Lamb."

And all the churches shall know that I am he that searcheth the reins and the hearts.

Here is seen the significance of the eyes that are as a flame of fire, eyes that pierce the coverings of the heart and search out its iniquity. Mark, too, "all the churches." These Epistles are addressed each to a particular Church, but the lessons and the warnings are for all the Churches of that time and of all time.

The Epistle having now exhausted this unpleasant subject, reverts to the note of commendation and encouragement.

But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.

That is a curious phrase, " as they speak," or " as they say," as in the Revised Version. It is supposed to refer to some phrase current at the time. The words, " none other burden," recall the letter from the Council at Jerusalem to the provincial churches in Acts xv. 28, and this makes the meaning clear. Those who were faithful and abstained from immorality and idolatry were not to be burdened with the requirement of compliance with the Jewish ceremonial law. It is enough if they hold by that which they have, and if they abstain from immorality and idolatry till the Master comes.

And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father.

These words follow the Second Psalm, whilst the last phrase recalls St. John's Gospel. It is not obvious why this promise of victory and dominion should be associated with a

comparatively unimportant place like Thyatira. But perhaps this very contrast suggests the association: confidence in the final and complete victory of the Church over all the powers of evil is the more strikingly manifested by associating this promise with this secondary city and this obscure Church.

And I will give him the morning star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

In this Epistle, as in the following three, the solemn appeal to listen to the voice of the Spirit comes after the final promises, and not before them as in the first three Epistles. The reason for this change of order is not clear, and any explanations which have been offered seem somewhat strained or fanciful. But there is so much art in the Epistles that the writer probably had some reason, though it may escape us. The promise "I will give him the morning star," seems almost to be worth all the rest of the letter. The morning star! Those haunting words fill the imagina-

tion and satisfy the soul like "the tree of life," or "the river of the water of life clear as crystal."

> Fairest of stars, last in the train of night,
> If, better, thou belong not to the dawn.

In the last chapter of Revelation, almost in the last verse we read, "I am the root and offspring of David, and the bright and morning star." These are the last words in Scripture concerning Our Lord. Here, where the morning star is promised to him that overcometh, there is perhaps a slightly different shade of meaning. But we do not ask or desire a crisp and definite meaning.

The star is a symbol of royalty, and the morning star is the harbinger of the freshness, beauty, and hope of early day. It shines on triumphantly when the darkness is past and the shadows have fled away, until at last in the full glory of the morning it—

> . . . restores its borrowed ray,
> That in Thy sunshine's blaze its day
> May brighter, fairer be.

But to whom is the morning star promised? "To him that overcometh and keepeth my

works until the end." There are some who seem to pass through life very easily. They have few enthusiasms and fewer anxieties. Their favourite watchwords are, "Why can't you leave it alone?" and "It will all come right in the end." They are not grievously harassed either by worldly cares or by spiritual unrest: they have few external, and still fewer internal conflicts. They have few quarrels, no serious troubles come, or such as come sit easily upon them and cause no lasting distress. Their faces are not furrowed by care, and they never lose their smooth baby skin until they are folded away. Such people may live contentedly and shed a mild sunshine around them, but the promise of this text is not for them. They are not the heirs of the morning star. No, the heir of the morning star is the man who has scaled the toilsome height to see the morning break, who has been tried, and has fought, and has prevailed after conflict long and sore, who has persevered amidst every discouragement, who has been faithful and steadfast to the end, who has overcome the world:

Who, rowing hard against the stream,
Saw distant gates of Eden gleam,
And did not dream it was a dream.

Let us then play the man, undismayed by wars without or wars within. In the world we may have tribulation, but we follow a Master who bids us "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world," and who has promised to him that "overcometh and keepeth my works unto the end," "I will give him the morning star."

CHAPTER VI

THE EPISTLE TO SARDIS

Rev. iii. 1-6

Revised Version

And to the Angel of the Church in Sardis write:

These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars: I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and thou art dead. Be thou watchful, and stablish the things that remain, which were ready to die: for I have found no works of thine fulfilled before my God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and didst hear; and keep it, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. But thou hast a few names in Sardis which did not defile their garments: and they shall walk with me in white; for they are worthy. He that overcometh shall thus be arrayed in white garments; and I will in no wise blot his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.

Authorised Version

1 And unto the Angel of the Church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.

SARDIS.

The ancient stronghold was on the hill to the left. The columns are ruins of temple of Cybele.

2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.

3 Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard; and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.

4 Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.

5 He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

6 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Sardis was an inland city of Asia Minor, situated upon a lofty crag overlooking a great and fertile valley. In early ages its fame far overshadowed that of Ephesus, Pergamum, or any of the other cities of Asia, and under the name of Hydé it is mentioned in Homer.[1] It was indeed one of the great cities of the world—perhaps the greatest city known to the Western nations, for it was the capital of the ancient kingdom of Lydia. That kingdom was the border power between Greek civilisation and the remoter East, and it long bore the brunt of conflict with the aggressive

[1] *Iliad*, xx. 385.

Western states. Here flourished a long line of famous monarchs, and the last of them who fell before Cyrus, the conquering Persian, has left a name which is still a familiar word —Croesus, the king of fabulous wealth. The city has a double association with the name of Cyrus, for it was from Sardis that the younger Cyrus set out on that famous expedition into the heart of Asia which Xenophon has described in his *Anabasis*.

The site of Sardis was one of great natural strength. The city was perched upon the summit of precipitous rocks, which rose to a height of some 1500 feet from the valley, and it was surrounded by precipices save for one narrow neck which connected it with adjoining heights. Although many times higher, the small plateau on the summit of the Sardis hill resembled somewhat the site of Edinburgh Castle. At Edinburgh there are precipitous rocks all round except at one place where there is a very narrow neck of access that connects the plateau with the old town of Edinburgh. So was it at Sardis. There was

one steep pathway by which the summit of the rock could be reached.

Notwithstanding its great natural strength, Sardis was more than once taken in war through the negligence of its garrison. It was so taken by Cyrus, king of Persia, when he dethroned Croesus, and again by Antiochus, king of Syria; on both occasions, as it is said, by stealthy climbing of clefts in the precipitous rocks by night. The garrison failed to watch against such an attack, and the foe came as a thief in the night.

The religion of Sardis was less Hellenised than that of most of the other cities. The patron divinity was Cybele, the fertile mother, who was associated with the reproductive and fertilising forces of nature—a sensuous pantheism.

Sardis had seen a great past, but at the date of the Apocalypse its fame lay almost wholly in that past. It was a decayed and dwindling city. Its glory had departed. Like the Church planted in its midst it had fallen from its high estate. It had a name to live, but it was dead, or at least dying. It had

never any great revival, though it languished on for centuries. And now the wind may sweep over it, and the rain descend on it, and the sun beat upon it, and nobody will be disturbed, for Sardis is desolate and forsaken of man. No homestead now crowns that once teeming summit.

And unto the Angel of the Church in Sardis write: These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars.

This description refers back to verse 4 of chapter i.: "Grace be unto you, and peace, from Him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before His throne"; and again to verse 16 of that chapter: "and he had in his right hand seven stars." The seven stars are referred to in the Epistle to Ephesus, and this is the only case of a repetition in the description of the sender of the Letters. The seven stars, as has been seen, are the Angels of the Seven Churches—the heavenly counterparts of the earthly Churches. The seven Spirits before the throne is a more difficult expression. As

was seen in the Letter to Smyrna the ten days of affliction therein referred to are not ten literal days, but a short definite period. So "seven" here does not mean that there are seven different Spirits. The "seven" is symbolical. It indicates completeness. The Spirit of God is spoken of as sevenfold or seven—"the plenitude of the Godhead in all its attributes and energies." These modes of thought and expression are difficult for moderns and Westerns. It is hard to think of seven as anything but a number—twice three and one more. But human thought and human language are very inadequate instruments to interpret the mysteries of the Godhead, and it may be that some of the most familiar expressions in our most cherished dogmas are really just as much counters as is the word "seven."

The reference to the Spirit which is found both in the seven Spirits and the seven stars is appropriate to the condition of the Church to which the letter is addressed, for the Church of Sardis at this time stood sorely in need of the quickening spirit of divine grace.

I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.

These are sharp words, very different from those addressed to any of the other Churches hitherto dealt with. In these other Churches there might be faults, but the opening words were words of praise. "I know thy works" were words of encouragement to other Churches. Here, they are words of sarcasm or scorn. The Church at Sardis was not a persecuted Church like the Church at Smyrna, it was not rent by heresy or schism like some of the other Churches. On the surface all was smooth. The outward form was seemly and orderly, but the life was away. The body was there in all its shapely proportions, but the soul had forsaken it. It is not clearly known what was the form of organisation of a Church in a city like Sardis at that time, but the condition of the Church of Sardis can readily be translated into the ideas of our own time. It is not difficult to figure a Church of Sardis in a modern city. There are the buildings, and it may be the endowment, the valid ministry, the stated services, the

orderly worship, the regular celebrations of communion, the fine organ and the excellent choir—all proper and as they should be. But there is no life, pastor and people are spiritually dead. Members of this Church will explain: "It is true that we give hardly anything to missionary schemes, but in our view charity begins at home, and we had to raise a large sum last year for repainting the church. Our sick and our poor may be seldom visited, but there are not very many of them; our congregation is well-to-do, and our minister and office-bearers are all men of good social position. We have no Guilds or Bible Classes or similar agencies, but we do not altogether neglect our young people; we are careful of their physical health, and our system of heating and ventilation will compare favourably with that of any other church in the town:" and so on. Some such congregations will always be found. They may be Established or Free, Presbyterian or Episcopalian, urban or rural, but they all belong to the Church of Sardis. They have a name to live and are dead.

But whilst particular congregations of the Church of Sardis are to be found everywhere throughout the world, the great typical and representative Church of Sardis in the modern world is the Eastern Church. That Church covers a vast continent. Its domain extends from Warsaw in the West to Saghalien in the East, and from Archangel in the North to Athens and Arabia in the South. There is much that is noble in its history, there is much that is admirable in its doctrine and worship, and there are many good and pious souls among its members. But judged as a whole it is a Church of Sardis, it has a name to live and is dead. Its external form is admirable, but its inner life does not respond. The two great outward marks of religious life in a church are missionary zeal and the rich production of devotional literature; the one is the mark of extensive force, the other the sign of intensive growth. But alas! the Eastern Church has no missionary zeal, and produces but scanty devotional literature. In both spheres the activities of the little land of Scotland surpass the activities of that

great continental Church. In doctrine and worship the Eastern Church is far nearer to British Protestants than is the Church of Rome, yet spiritually the Church of Rome is nearer to them than is the Eastern Church: for the Church of Rome is at least earnest, active, and enthusiastic—the Church of Rome is alive. It may be a Church of Pergamum or Thyatira, but it is not a Church of Sardis. Among the results of the great world upheaval most earnestly to be longed for in the interests of the common faith, is a great awakening and revival of the Eastern Church.

Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die; for I have not found thy works perfect before God.

One is struck by the note of hope after the severe rebuke. There is still something left in this cold indifferent Church, still something to build upon, something worth preserving. The outward form remains, and in that there is hope. It is a very common, perhaps almost a fashionable idea in these days, that where there is no fire it is better

to have no grate. If there is no real religious faith, no religious zeal, it is better not to keep up religious forms. That is, however, a mistaken idea. There is an old saying which is in accordance with religious experience, "Keep the frame and the picture may grow into it." However irreligious and worldly a community may be, it is well that the children are baptized, marriage solemnised by the Church, and the services of the Church sought after at the burial of the dead. Keep up these things and there is more hope for the community than if these things be abandoned. Anything rather than frank unblushing paganism. A worthy Scottish Roman Catholic once said: "I don't like Protestants as such, but I'd much rather see the peasantry of Scotland Protestants than pagans, anything is better than a pagan peasantry." For similar reasons it is permissible to withhold sympathy from those who, in the absence of any disposition on the part of large masses of the people in Latin countries to become Protestants, seek to undermine the faith of the people in their own native Church.

Let us be watchful then and careful to strengthen the things which remain. If we attend church let us persevere in our attendance. If we have family worship let us continue it. If we pray to God let us still pray, however weak our faith. If we read the Bible let us persevere in so doing. Even if we can say none of these things, and if the last reflection of religion lingering in our worldly lives is that we do not play cards upon Sunday, then let us stick to that and not play upon Sunday. Even into that poor apology for a frame a picture may grow. Let us strengthen the things that remain, that are ready to die. Let us break down no barrier, however thin, that divides us spiritually from the beasts that perish.

Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard; and hold fast, and repent.

This passage shows us that the Church, like the city of Sardis, had seen better days. There had been a time when the Gospel was gladly received, and the Master now urges the Church to revive the memory of these days,

and doing so to repent and to renew its life in Him.

If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.

The idea of the Master coming as a thief in the night is not new, but no doubt it is here employed on account of the history of Sardis before referred to. Sardis had twice fallen into the hands of an enemy, and it had lost its estate as the capital of a kingdom because the garrison did not watch. The foe came upon the town stealthily by night.

Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments.

Even in Sardis, notwithstanding its backsliding, there were a few souls which had kept themselves unspotted from the world. There is here a warning against prejudice, against sweeping and universal condemnation. Whether it be a class of the community, a religious sect, a race, or a nation, which offends us, we are apt to sweep in all who

belong to it in a common condemnation as if every individual member was partaker in a common guilt.

But there is another and an even more important lesson. The faithful in Sardis were few in number. They had stood out against the prevailing example which set a low standard of life and conduct. Now there is an inveterate tendency in the human mind to avoid looking at doubtful conduct on its own merits, and to find in the example of others an excuse for contentment with a low standard. One constantly notices the manifestation of this tendency in young children. When they are forbidden to do something they propose they do not try to justify the proposal on its own merits. No; the favourite weapon of retort is "John Smith does," or "Annie Paterson does it," or "the Robertson children are allowed to do it." But the tendency, though it manifests itself in childhood, is not peculiar to children. Very often it persists throughout life, and it cannot therefore be attributed to inability to discuss matters of conduct upon their own merits.

Many of all ages and of both sexes, instead of setting a high ideal before them and trying to live up to it, keep constantly before them unworthy examples just up to the standard of conventional respectability, and they are quite content if they do not themselves fall below this standard. "A," they say, "may be near the angels, but we cannot be expected to live up to A. It is enough that we are no worse than B, whom nobody deems a devil."

The members of the Church in Sardis who received such warm commendation from the Master were those who did not yield to the temptation to shelter themselves behind the low conventional standard of the Church. There might be a measure of formal respectability but there was no zeal, no life, in the mass. There was therefore abundant example of how not to live the life of renunciation and service, and abundant temptation to follow that example. But the faithful in Sardis did not yield. They set high ideals before them, they did not conform to the world, and the Master declares, "They shall walk before me in white for they are worthy."

These words recall the passage in chapter vii. 14, "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." A comparison of the two passages brings out the contrast between two aspects of truth—Paul and James. The former insists upon the need for redemption and cleansing through the merits of Christ. The latter urges the believer to keep himself unspotted from the world. There is truth in both aspects of the matter.

White, as has been pointed out, is the colour of victory; it is also the colour of purity. Doubtless in the passage there is an allusion to the Roman triumph. At a triumph upon the conclusion of a successful war white was the colour of the garments worn by all who walked in the procession. So the Lord promises to the faithful that they shall walk with Him in white in the day of His triumph.

> But, lo! there breaks a yet more glorious day:
> The saints triumphant rise in bright array;
> The King of Glory passes on His way.

He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed

in white raiment; and I will not blot his name out of the book of life.

The reference to white raiment is here a repetition which gives emphasis to what has already been said—the promise of the white robe of victory. The idea of the book of life is said to be founded upon the roll of the citizens of a town—in the case of the Jews in particular a roll of the citizens of Jerusalem to which Isaiah (iv. 3) refers. The image is of frequent use in Scripture. Our Lord bids His disciples to rejoice because their names are written in Heaven. St. Paul refers to some of his followers as being among those whose names are in the book of life. Besides the idea of a roll of citizens there was the other idea of a book recording deeds or conduct, good or bad. From this is derived the mediaeval idea of the Recording Angel. But this book of record cannot be the book of life, for in the Recording Angel's book the names which occur most frequently are probably those which are not in the book of life. We find both ideas in a remarkable passage in Revelation xx. 12:

> "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God: and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works."

The idea of a roll of names, a place in which is to be coveted, has recently been brought widely before the public mind. Every congregation, every parish, every village has its Roll of Honour upon which are inscribed the names of those who in the hour of national peril have come forward at their country's call as soldiers of the king. Age, sex, health, or overpowering circumstances forbid some to have their name inscribed upon that roll, and one cannot envy those who, having no such obstacle, will in after years be called upon to account for the absence of their name from that roll. It is indeed a roll of honour, and it is not to disparage it that one recalls that it belongs to time and to a temporal kingdom. The heavenly roll, the book of life, belongs to

eternity and to an everlasting kingdom. Neither age nor sex nor circumstances can forbid the inscription of a name upon that roll. Few Christians now hold literally by the old dogma of a sealed roll to which no name can be added, and from which no name can be blotted out—a doctrine which seems strangely inconsistent with the words of this very passage. Good people have held that doctrine and penitent souls have been troubled with terror lest their names were not in that book. No such terrors need trouble us. We believe that He who can blot out a name can also inscribe a name, that He who can give a new name can place that name in the book of life, and that He will write there the name of whosoever comes, like the dying thief, humbly beseeching him, "Lord, remember me."

But I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

The words and the idea both follow closely Our Lord's sayings to His disciples, as recorded in St. John's Gospel. Many have been

familiarised with the thought by the words of the old paraphrase :

> Then will He own His servant's name
> Before His Father's face,
> And in the New Jerusalem
> Appoint my soul a place.

It is a wonderful promise, but one is so familiar with it that perhaps one hardly realises its significance.

> " When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained ; what is man, that thou art mindful of him ? and the son of man, that thou visitest him ? "

What is man ? and what are we among the sons of men ? And yet the Eternal Son of God has not only stooped to ask of each one of us the love of our poor heart, but He has also promised that if we give Him that love, if we be faithful to His commandments, He will acknowledge us before the throne of God.

> " Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world : for I was an hungered,

and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. . . . Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

. . . . .

"They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels."

PHILADELPHIA.

CHAPTER VII

THE EPISTLE TO PHILADELPHIA

Rev. iii. 7-13

Revised Version

And to the Angel of the Church in Philadelphia write;

These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and none shall shut, and that shutteth, and none openeth: I know thy works (behold, I have set before thee a door opened, which none can shut), that thou hast a little power, and didst keep my word, and didst not deny my name. Behold, I give of the synagogue of Satan, of them which say they are Jews, and they are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. Because thou didst keep the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of trial, that hour which is to come upon the whole world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. I come quickly: hold fast that which thou hast, that no one take thy crown. He that overcometh, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go out thence no more: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of Heaven from my God, and mine own new name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.

Authorised Version

7 And to the Angel of the Church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth;

8 I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.

9 Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.

10 Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

11 Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.

12 Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out; and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God; and I will write upon him my new name.

13 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Philadelphia was a secondary but not unimportant inland city of the Province of Asia. It was situated upon the great trade route from Smyrna to the East, and like the others of the seven cities it lay on the main road and appears to have been the centre of a group and of one of the Circuits of the

postal correspondence. Unlike other cities, which have mostly grown up from obscure origins, Philadelphia had a definite beginning. It was founded about 150 B.C. by Attalus II., king of Pergamum. The object of the founder was to make the new city a centre of Greek language, civilisation, and culture in that Eastern land. In this sense Philadelphia was from the commencement a missionary city. In the year A.D. 19, when Jesus was still a youth in the house of Joseph at Nazareth, an appalling catastrophe overtook Philadelphia. The city was entirely destroyed by earthquake, and many of its inhabitants perished. It was long ere the survivors ventured to return. They lived outside in tents and huts, and for many years such places were the resort of numbers of the people whenever a great disturbance seemed to threaten. For a long period, and down, perhaps, to the date of the Apocalypse, a terror was always present in and around the city.

In these days it was not uncommon for a city to take or to be given a new name in

honour of one of the imperial family. Under Tiberius Philadelphia got the name of New Kaiseria or New Caesarea, in honour, as it is believed, of Prince Germanicus, nephew of Tiberius, the heir to the imperial throne. A temple to the young Caesar was founded in the city. But Germanicus perished by poison; he never attained the purple, and so the new name came to be dropped and the temple to fall into decay. Again, for a short period between A.D. 70 and 80, during the time of the Flavian emperors, the city seems to have taken the new name of Flavia, but this too was soon dropped.

When the power of the Cross waned before the Crescent in Asia, Philadelphia long stood out as a free and semi-independent city, and for many years it waged a heroic war against the Turkish power. At length, however, in 1390, it fell, and from that time the Turk has held sway. The Turkish name of the town is *Ala Sheyr*, and it has a population of about 20,000, the majority of whom are Moslems. But there is still a Christian community, and there is reason to believe that the voice of

Christian prayer has never been silent in Philadelphia since the date of the Epistle. The days of trial came and the lamp of faith may have flickered, but it has never gone out. Philadelphia is a bright name in Christian history.

It is curious how Philadelphia in the East, which has lost its own name, has given a name to a modern city of the West, which in wealth and population far surpasses the ancient Eastern town. When William Penn founded the colony of Pennsylvania, he gave to the capital the name of Philadelphia, influenced thereto no doubt both by the pleasant character of the name and by the good report of Philadelphia in the Book of Revelation. But alas! owing to the divisions of the present day would not an Epistle to "the Church in Philadelphia" be returned from the American city marked "insufficiently addressed"?

And to the Angel of the Church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of

David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth.

There seems in this case to be a measure of departure in the description of the sender of the letters from the language and imagery already used in the first chapter of the Book. True he is there spoken of as having keys, but they are the keys of Death and of Hell, not the key of David. The words, "holy and true," are used elsewhere in Revelation of the Most High. Their use in this passage is probably associated with the character of the Church addressed. The Church of Philadelphia was a faithful Church. It had kept the Master's word, and had not denied His name although assailed by the malice and persecution of the Jews. And it was a holy Church, for it had kept the divine word and had faithfully endured so that the Master says of it, "I have loved thee."

The reference to the key of David seems to follow a passage in Isaiah xxii. 20:

> "And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah: . . . and the key of the

House of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open."

The key of David in the Old Testament is the key of Jerusalem—the key of the city of David. The key of David in the New Testament is the key of the new Jerusalem—the key of the city of God. Jesus holds that key. He can unlock the gates of that city and admit whom He will. The idea is probably here associated with a refuge from distress in view of the trials that had befallen the city and the Church. Jesus opens, and no man can shut out whom Jesus will admit. Jesus shuts, and no man can force his way in to trouble or disturb the Lord's people.

I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.

As in the case of Smyrna so in the case of Philadelphia, the note is one of praise unqualified by censure. Philadelphia was a

faithful Church in the midst of temptation, trial, and persecution. Its strength was made perfect in weakness, for it was not an influential, numerous, or wealthy Church. The meaning seems to be, "Though thou hast but little strength, though thou art a weak and struggling Church, thou hast been faithful to my gospel and been loyal to my name." The *name* was a word of note in those days. Loyalty to the *name* was the symbol of the faith. It was for this loyalty that Christians endured the fire of Roman persecution. Perhaps some echo of this may be traced in the strange, though seemingly harmless, heresy of the monks in the Russian monastery of Mount Athos, viz. that the name of God is itself divine—a part of the Godhead.

The open door set before the Church at Philadelphia has generally been associated with the missionary idea. The figure was so used by St. Paul on several occasions. Philadelphia, as has been shown, was founded as in a way a missionary city to spread Greek culture and Greek ideals in Asia Minor. The town was situated on the highway at the pass

into a wide district in the interior, of which it held the key. And now a wider and holier missionary sphere had opened before it. Here was a door for an entrance with the message of the Gospel into the heathen world beyond. The missionary motive is appropriately associated with the Master's love for the Church and His intimate relations with it. "I have loved thee." Reciprocal affection bears its natural fruit in missionary zeal. Personal devotion to the Master and the missionary spirit go hand in hand. It was so in the days of old, and it is so in the modern Church. Wherever missionary enthusiasm is found, there is found also deep personal devotion to the Master. The missionary spirit springs from and calls forth in deeper measure that loyalty to Jesus which finds in Him the source of all life and light and peace, which accepts obedience to Him as the supreme law of life, and recognises that in Him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead—

> Of the Father's love begotten
> Ere the worlds began to be,
> He is Alpha and Omega,
> He the source, the ending He.

Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.

The Church at Philadelphia, like the Church at Smyrna, was the object of the hostility of the Jews. But here, as in the Letter to Smyrna, the claim of these persecutors to be the true Israel is denied. The weak Church is comforted with the assurance of triumph over them. They shall be brought low, and they shall be made to recognise the divine love for the Church which they have contemned and persecuted. There is a wonderful sweetness in the midst of so much that is stern in these words, "I have loved thee." The language of this verse follows the Old Testament Isaiah (xliii. 4, xlv. 14; Malachi i. 2). The Church has taken the place of Israel as the inheritor of the promises.

Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

"Kept the word of my patience" is a curious expression. It seems to be a figure of speech conveying, did patiently keep my word; or perhaps more exactly, did keep my word which requires patience on the part of him who strives to do so. The corresponding promise, the counterpart of the faithful keeping, is that the Master will keep the Church from the hour of trial. The Book of Revelation clearly forecasts a coming period of trouble, and this took shape in the form of a general and bitter persecution of the Christian Church throughout the Empire. By keeping "from the hour of trial," is meant, perhaps, not so much the keeping of the trial away altogether, as the preservation of the Church in the midst of trial. The word here rendered trial is the same in the original as is rendered temptation in the Lord's Prayer. Succour in the hour of temptation is promised to the Church.

Behold, I come quickly.

"Come quickly" did not mean quite the same to the Church of the first century as it means to-day. The words have a meaning

of their own to-day. The Lord may come quickly to any soul, and He will not be long of coming to any one of us. And even His Second Coming in a wider and more general sense will be quick in relation to the immensities of time. But the Christian of the first century cherished a far more immediate and vivid expectation of the coming of the Lord back to earth in a form manifest to all. He looked for it within his own time if he should not happen to be very soon called away. This thought pervades the Apostolic teaching. Paul or John would have been amazed, perhaps even dismayed, had he been told that after more than eighteen hundred years the Lord would still tarry. We see things in a different perspective. History has taught us much in regard to our dispensation and to the purpose of God in Christ that was hid even from the Apostles. But the Second Coming of the Lord is still through all the ages the hope and expectation of the Church. As individuals we may hardly look for any coming to ourselves, save that coming which awaits each one when his call sounds. But

from age to age the Church must have her eyes always fixed upon the East.

Thou art coming, oh my Saviour,
Thou art coming, oh my King,
In thy beauty all resplendent,
In Thy glory all-transcendent,
Well may we rejoice and sing.
Coming! in the opening east
Herald brightness slowly swells;
Coming! Oh my glorious Priest,
Hear we not Thy golden bells?

Poetry! Yes, but beneath it lies one of the great doctrines of the faith never to be forgotten. "From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead."

Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.

This crown is not a royal crown, but is a victor's wreath, the prize of victory in the combat. This prize has been already earned by the heroic fidelity of the Church; let the Church then hold it fast, let not Jew or Roman pluck it away.

Him that overcometh shall I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out.

In this passage there is probably local and historical allusion. The temple of Emperor worship at Philadelphia had fallen into neglect and decay. Another dynasty had arisen that knew not Germanicus. But the Church of Philadelphia is assured that to it will be given a place of honour in a more enduring temple. It will be made a pillar in the temple of God. The letter breathes throughout the note of familiarity with trial, of persevering conflict with difficulty, of strength in weakness. In the words "he shall go no more out," there seems to be an allusion to the peculiar danger and trial of the town which led its inhabitants to go out and seek safety in the fields. But for this Church there shall be no more crumbling ruins, no more desolate wanderings; it shall be a stately pillar immovably fixed in the temple of the Most High.

And I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God; and I will write upon him my new name.

The figures of the pillar and of the writing are probably associated. Whoso overcometh is to be a pillar in the House of God; the writing is to be upon him as an inscription is upon a pillar. There is, too, here probably an allusion to the new name which, as was seen, was given to the city of Philadelphia in honour of an imperial god. That new name had perished with the temple of its worship. But the new name which the Master gives will not be taken away. It is written upon a pillar in an enduring temple. The new name leads one again into the region of devout mysticism. Three names are spoken of. The name of God, the name of the New Jerusalem, and the name of the Master—my new name.

Professor Ramsay suggests that this passage does not refer to three several names, but to one name which in some mystic way combines all three ideas. This is not obvious, and is perhaps a subtlety which complicates what is already sufficiently mysterious. The primary intention of the promise is that the sender of the message is going to write three

names, the name of God, the name of the New Jerusalem, and his own new name—the Father, the City, the Saviour—sonship, citizenship, salvation. In this promise is found at once the sense of intimacy and the sense of mystery which are both of religious significance and value. The words imply intimacy and secret confidence between God and man. One recalls the words of St. Paul :

> "I knew such a man (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell : God knoweth :) how that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (2 Cor. xii. 3).

That is an impressive phrase, " the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God." The giving of the name of the city was the mark or seal of citizenship. As, to the Hebrew, Jerusalem was the beloved capital of his people and his religion, the home and altar of his race, so the heavenly city was figured by early Hebrew Christians as Jerusalem—a new Jerusalem purged of all

that was transitory, imperfect, and impure. One recalls the words of haunting beauty in another chapter of Revelation (xxi. 1, 2):

> "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared, as a bride adorned for her husband."

So in the passage before us with the name of God the Creator and of Christ the Redeemer, is associated the name of the city of God, the refuge and the resting-place of His people.

In these words, "which cometh down out of heaven from my God," this Epistle meets and answers a theory of religion and of life which is widely current in the present day. It proclaims that the coming of the kingdom of God is a supernatural event. (This phrase is here used for want of a better, though "supernatural" is usually associated exclusively with physical miracle.) Man cannot

build up the city of God by his own efforts here. He may be kind and charitable, and self-dènying and compassionate,—all this is well, but he will not thereby build the city of God. That city comes down from heaven. One of the most eloquent of modern preachers once preached from the text, "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is." The full text runs, "the life that now is, and that which is to come." But the preacher in announcing it and dwelling upon it stopped short at the words "which now is." As one listened to that sermon one realised that all the charm of eloquence could not make that a soul-inspiring theme. There was a certain useful aspect of truth no doubt, just as there is such in the maxim "honesty is the best policy." But there was no message for the healing of the nations. Man may toil long and struggle hard, but he will never build up the city of God from earth to heaven. His efforts will be vain as were those of the builders of the Tower of Babel, for he can find here no sure foundation. No.

The city of God must come down from above. No eye beholds the building of that city, there is no hammer nor axe, nor any tool of iron heard. It comes down out of heaven from God.

CHAPTER VIII

THE EPISTLE TO LAODICEA

Rev. iii. 14-22

REVISED VERSION

AND to the Angel of the Church in Laodicea write:

These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God: I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spew thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art the wretched one and miserable and poor and blind and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold refined by fire, that thou mayest become rich; and white garments, that thou mayest clothe thyself, and that the shame of thy nakedness be not made manifest; and eye-salve to anoint thine eyes, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I reprove and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. He that overcometh, I will give to him to sit down with me in my throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.

LAODICEA

AUTHORISED VERSION

14 And unto the Angel of the Church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the beginning of the creation of God;

15 I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.

16 So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

17 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:

18 I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see.

19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

21 To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

22 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Ephesus is mentioned several times in the Book of Acts, but Smyrna, Pergamum, Sardis, and Philadelphia are not mentioned in the New Testament elsewhere than in these Epistles. To Thyatira there is an incidental allusion in Acts in connection with the name

of Lydia, seller of purple of that city. Finally, Laodicea is not mentioned in the narrative books of the New Testament, but it is referred to more than once in St. Paul's Epistle to the Colossians. Laodicea and Colosse were situated in the same valley, at no great distance apart.

> "For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh" (Col. ii. 1).

It appears from this passage that Laodicea was one of the Churches of Asia founded during St. Paul's sojourn at Ephesus, but not by St. Paul himself, for he had not been there. This Church had not seen his face in the flesh. The passage affords a glimpse into the wonderful mind and heart of St. Paul. There were important churches in many lands with which he had been personally associated, but here he is found testifying to his anxious prayerful solicitude for this provincial Church to which he was personally a stranger.

Again, later in the Epistle, referring to

Epaphras who was with Paul in Rome, and who appears to have been a native of Colosse, the Apostle writes :

> " For I bear him record that he hath great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis " (iv. 13).

Like Laodicea, Hierapolis was a neighbouring city to Colosse. There are two other references :

> " Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house. . . .
>
> " And when this epistle hath been read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans ; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea " (iv. 15-16).

It was long supposed that the second Epistle here referred to, that from Laodicea, was a lost Epistle of St. Paul. It is now, however, held by many that the Epistle referred to was what is known as the Epistle to the Ephesians. That Epistle no doubt bears in our version to be addressed to the

Church at Ephesus, but some of the oldest manuscripts do not contain the words "at Ephesus," and the Epistle may have been a circular one intended to go round several Churches. It is to be noted that Paul refers not to the Epistle to Laodicea, but the Epistle from Laodicea, *i.e.* the place from which it was to be forwarded to Colosse.

Laodicea was founded by Antiochus II., king of Syria, about 250 B.C. He named the city after his wife Laodice. Doubtless this was intended as a compliment to the lady, but in giving to the city the name of his wife the founder unwittingly bequeathed a word of unpleasant flavour to the English language — "Laodicean." [1] Like Philadelphia, Laodicea was probably intended to be a centre of Greek influence and culture, but in this case the experiment appears not to have been successful. The city prospered, but not as a centre of Greek influence and Greek ideals. Its prosperity was commercial. Situated upon the great highway of commerce between the coast of Asia Minor and the

[1] The disservice was avenged, for Laodice ultimately poisoned Antiochus.

valley of the Euphrates at an important road junction, Laodicea became an influential business centre. Important and wealthy banks sprang up ; there was a large through-carrying business, and the city itself became celebrated for the manufacture of black woollen goods of a peculiar glossy texture. Laodicea suffered greatly from earthquakes in the first century. But such was the wealth and independence of the city that it proudly declined any imperial assistance in its calamity. Another feature of the town was its medical school, and one of the famous medicines of this district was a special application for the eyes. Laodicea then was a city of banks, it declined assistance under the calamity of earthquake, it manufactured black woollen goods, and it produced a medicine for the eyes. These details are worth noting, for they are all referred to in this short Epistle. A Synod or Council of the Church was held at Laodicea in the fourth century. Among other business which this body undertook was the drawing up of a list of the Books of Scripture which were to be

deemed canonical. Oddly enough the Book of Revelation, which has made the name of Laodicea familiar to the Christian world, was omitted from the list. The later history of the city was not eventful. It passed with the rest of Asia Minor under Turkish yoke, and it sank to ruin and decay so that its site is now derelict.

And unto the Angel of the Church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.

There is here a certain variation of the expressions used in Revelation i. "Jesus Christ, who is the faithful Witness, and the first-begotten of the dead." By the "beginning of the creation of God" is to be understood the source of creation rather than that which is first created; and the expression "creation of God," though not exclusive of the material world, points specially to the spiritual world. Christ is the source, the beginning of spiritual life. "Amen" is a Hebrew word of solemn affirmation, meaning

"So be it" when it comes at the end of a prayer, and "verily" when it comes at the beginning of a solemn statement. Its use by figure of speech as descriptive of Jesus is peculiar to this passage. It seems to be intended as an emphatic way of describing Him as the truth.

I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

Laodicea was neither cold nor hot, and though this expression and this condition are not in themselves difficult to understand, it requires some care to discriminate the condition of Laodicea from that of some of the other Churches, and in particular Sardis and Ephesus. Sardis was cold. Its religion was formal. Laodicea was not cold. There was a certain mild glow of good intention about the place. Ephesus, again, had lost its first love, but Ephesus was not yet lukewarm. There was still zeal and energy

there, albeit these had lost a little of their freshness.

St. Paul compares the Christian life to a race, and one is thereby emboldened to use a cognate illustration. One may take the attitude of different people to a game as illustrating the differences of character and temperament between these three Churches. Among the followers of a game there is the man who is still a strong active player, but who is not just quite so enthusiastic—so keen—as he once was. He used to be eager for a third game, but now he generally finds two quite enough. He used to play in all weathers, but now he stays indoors when it is really a wet day. That is the case of Ephesus, the orthodox active Church which has lost its first love. Then again another may be found who has all that is needed for the game. He is a member of a club, he possesses all the tools and implements—a complete and elegant set—and the proper costume for the game; but he very seldom plays, and he generally has some excuse ready when a game is suggested. As a player he is

a formalist. That is the case of Sardis, which has a name to live and is dead. Then finally, a third may be found who believes in his own play, who plays occasionally, plays fairly well, and would be much surprised if any doubt were suggested as to his being a follower of the game. But he is not keen. Sometimes he forgets the score, again if a shower threatens he thinks it would be prudent to stop, and at another time he proposes to curtail the game in case of being late for lunch. He is neither one thing nor another—that is the case of Laodicea, neither cold nor hot.

These, then, are illustrations of the three types, Ephesus, Sardis, and Laodicea. Any person who is himself keen in the sport he follows can appreciate in this relation the saying, "I would thou wert cold or hot." The keen person can more readily put up with the cold person who won't play at all, than with the person who essays to play but shows little interest and puts no life into the game. In the expression under consideration some commentators have found an affirmation that it is better to be without religion than to

be lukewarm in religion. But it is straining too far language which is rhetorical and figurative to attach to it this general significance. There may be cases of which it holds true, but it is not true as a general proposition. Another idea for which there may be something to be said, is that the figure changes in the middle of the sentence, and that the words "cold or hot" in the last clause mean two good things. The disagreeable thing is that which has the virtue of neither.

The word "*spue*" is not now used in polite English, and one cannot understand why the compilers of the Revised Version have retained it, though altering the spelling as a less offensive expression could readily have been found. There is allusion in the passage to the nauseating physical effect of tepid water, and the expression emphasises the extreme dissatisfaction of the sender of the Epistle with the lukewarm condition of the Church.

Because thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and

knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.

There seems to be here an allusion to the self-satisfaction which led Laodicea to decline all assistance after the earthquake. The city was self-sufficient. It had need of nothing. It has been disputed whether the self-satisfaction of the Church here referred to was material or spiritual, but probably there is a blending of both ideas. Self-satisfaction is often an accompaniment of the Laodicean religious temperament. The Laodicean does not recognise his deficiencies; he thinks he does very well. His is often a double pride. He prides himself that he is not as these careless irreligious people or open scoffers who have separated themselves from the ordinances of the Church. On the other hand he prides himself on his lack of enthusiasm. He is not goody-goody, or gospel-greedy, he is no fanatic. No, he is a sober, moderate, tolerant person who, as he himself believes, manages with fair success to make the best of both worlds. He fights shy of all new departures, especially if there is much enthusiasm

about them; but he does not scoff at the old well-established schemes and enterprises of the Church. No; he contributes to them if he happens to be present when an offering is taken, though of course he is always careful to see that he does not give too much. There are varieties among Laodiceans, but this is a common type.

The tendency is widely prevalent in the present day, indeed few are without some strain of it. Men may not be unbelievers or careless; they may recognise the value of religion to themselves and to the world, and they may have no intention of giving it up or neglecting it. They are not cold, but then neither are they hot. With many it is not How much can I do? but, on the contrary, it is How little will pass muster? What is the lowest standard of public worship, private devotion, and Christian liberality that one can conform to and still claim to be a worthy religious person?

I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment,

that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear ; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve,[1] *that thou mayest see.*

The three things which the Church is counselled to buy are the counterparts of the things that are lacking. The Church is poor and blind and naked. It must buy gold that it may be no longer poor ; eye-salve that its vision may be restored ; white raiment, the vesture of purity, that it may be clothed. "Buy" is a curious expression. Surely the man who can buy, and can buy even gold, cannot be poor. But "buy" is here used in the sense simply of obtaining from another. The Church must obtain these things by asking them of the Lord as a gift from His fulness and bounty. One recalls a similar use of the word in Isaiah (lv. 1) : "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money ; come ye, buy and eat ; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price."

The sentence of the Epistle now under

[1] A mistranslation. It should be "And eye-salve to anoint thine eyes." The eye-salve is one of the things that are to be bought.

consideration is a mosaic of local allusion. In the buying of gold there is a reference to the banking business of the town. The white raiment contrasts with the black woollen garments which the city manufactured. The eye-salve is a direct allusion to the medicine for which the district was famous.

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten ; be zealous therefore, and repent.

The denunciation of Laodicea is sharp and stern ; almost too sharp and stern one might think for what is a fault of degree. Surely lack of warmth deserves milder censure than apostacy or immorality. This sentence takes the edge off that difficulty. The condemnation is not absolute and final, like the condemnation of the backsliders of Thyatira who have refused to listen to the voice calling for repentance. It is the voice of disappointed affection which is heard, not the angry judgment against the sinner. There is still hope. " Whom the Father loveth he chasteneth."

Behold, I stand at the door and knock : if

any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

A great modern artist painted a picture of Our Lord standing at a door, and he called it "The Light of the World." Most people have seen an engraving of that picture; to many it has been familiar from childhood. The Saviour stands at the door, a lamp in one hand, the other hand raised to knock. The door has long been shut, for it is overgrown with strong shoots of ivy. The artist painted that picture when he was a young man. Forty or fifty years passed, and the artist said, "I wish to paint that over again before I die." So he painted over again the same picture, or almost the same; for the symbolism of the later picture, especially about the lamp, is somewhat richer and fuller in detail. So there are now two originals of this picture. Perhaps no religious picture by any modern painter has so touched the imagination of mankind. "The Angelus"—the two workers in the field bowing reverently at sound of the evening bell—seems to compare with it in

the universality of its appeal. In the one—"The Angelus"—we see man seeking after God; in the other—"The Light of the World"—we see God seeking after man.

In all ages and among all peoples the common meal has been the symbol of brotherhood, and Jesus consecrated this symbol when He instituted the Lord's Supper. There is emphasis and friendliness as well in the repetition with inversion in the position of the words, "I will sup with him and he with me." They recall, as do many of the expressions in this letter, not the exact words, but the tone and atmosphere of the Fourth Gospel. This promise is in a different position from the promises throughout these Epistles to him that overcometh. "Overcometh" is suggestive of a long and fierce struggle, and the promises connected with the word are of final reward when the conflict is over. But this promise here is an offer for the present: it can be accepted and fulfilled now. It demands no weary waiting, no long struggle. Just open the door. That is all. I am without. I am waiting. Open and I will

come in, not some days after long perseverance, not to-morrow, but to-day, now. Wilt not thou open the door? The crown of life and the morning star, these thou hast yet to earn. I cannot give them now. But open the door of thine heart, and I will come in and sup with thee and thou with Me, this night.

To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

This particular Epistle concludes, like all the others, with a promise to him that overcometh. But, as has been remarked with apparent justice, in the grandeur of the final promise we seem to lose sight of Laodicea, and we may regard this as a final message to the whole group of Churches, and thus as a promise to all the Churches of the Lord. In the day of His flesh before His exaltation, the Master thus poured out His heart to His Father:

> "The glory which thou gavest me I have given them . . . Father, I will that they

also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am."

Yes. Wheresoever the Master is His faithful followers will be beside Him, and as He now sits exalted upon the throne, there, too, beside Him sit those whom the Father has given Him. "If we suffer with Him we shall also reign with Him." The mystery and the grandeur of the conception far transcend the imagination of the mind of man.

> "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

These words occur in every Epistle, and here they fitly close the series. It is worthy of note that the injunction runs not what "the Spirit saith unto the church" but what "the Spirit saith unto the churches." The particular terms of each letter are suggested by and take a colour from the particular

circumstances of the several Churches. But the letters are for all the Churches, not only of Asia but of the world, not only of that time but of all time. The faults and failings dealt with are found among congregations and individuals in every Church. The words of rebuke, of warning, and of encouragement, and the glorious promises are for all the Churches. One would close these brief studies with the accent upon the promises. The fruit of the tree of life, the crown of life, the white stone on which a secret new name is written, the morning star, the white garments of victory, the new Jerusalem, the seat beside the Master on His throne,—these are not for the Church of Asia alone. They are for the ransomed of all time.

Who may hope to gain them
After weary fight ?
Who at length attain them,
Clad in robe of white ?

He who wakes from slumber
At the Spirit's voice,
Daring here to number
Things unseen his choice.

" Blessed are they that do his com-

mandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. . . .

"I Jesus have sent my Angel to testify unto you these things in the Churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star. And the Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

THE END

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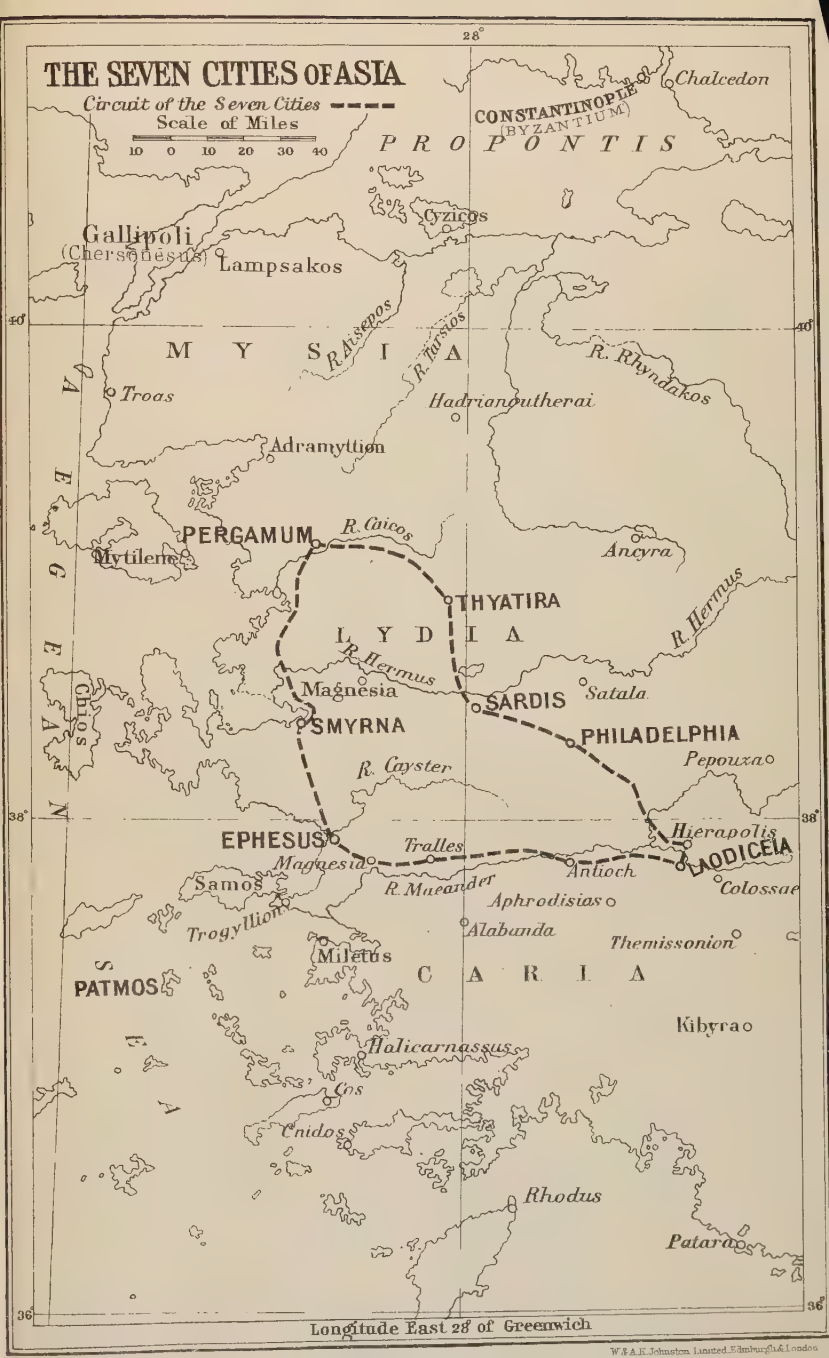
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